DAVE DARRIN'S THIRD YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS

H. IRVING HANCOCK

ANNAPOLIS SERIES

"There She Goes!"

Frontispiece—Annapolis No. 3

Dave Darrin's Third Year at Annapolis

OR

Leaders of the Second Class Midshipmen

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Illustrated

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Dave Darrin's Third Year at Annapolis

CHAPTER I

WHY THE MIDSHIPMEN BALKED

"SO Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton have been here?" demanded Midshipman Dave Darrin.

That handsome young member of the brigade of midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis was now in mufti. or cits.—meaning, in other words, that he was out of his Naval uniform and attired in the conventional clothing of a young American when calling on his sweetheart.

It will make the situation even clearer to the reader to explain that Dave was back in the home town, on his September leave, after just having completed his second summer practice cruise with the three upper classes from Annapolis.

Dave was now a fine looking and "husky"

second classman. He was just a shade more than half way through his course of instruction at Annapolis.

Being back in the home town, where would Midshipman Darrin be more naturally found than in the parlor at the home of his sweetheart, Miss Belle Meade?

The first greetings had been exchanged fifteen minutes before.

Since that time the young people, being sweethearts as they were, had naturally talked about themselves.

And Dave, who, in the Naval service, was fast learning to become a good listener, had been content to have Belle do most of the talking, while he sat back watching the motions of her pretty lips and catching glimpses of two rows of pearly teeth.

But now Belle had just mentioned two of Dave's former High School chums.

"So Tom and Harry were really here?" he repeated.

"Yes; they came up from Arizona on leave."

"I wonder why they couldn't have remained here longer?" mused Dave.

"They both told me that they were very young in their profession as civil engineers, and that they had to spend nearly all of their time 'on the job,' as Tom phrased it," replied Belle.

"How did they look?" asked Dave.

"A shade older, of course, than when they were in the High School."

"Are they much taller?" asked Darrin.

"Somewhat; but they have not shot up in height, the way you and Dan, and Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes have done," Belle continued.

"Brown as berries, I suppose, after working down in the alkali deserts?" asked Dave, who felt that he could not hear enough of those dear old chums.

"Meaning Tom and Harry?" smiled Belle. "Or Dick and Greg?"

"Tom and Harry, that time, of course," laughed Dave. "But I'm waiting to hear a whole lot about Dick and Greg as well."

"No; I wouldn't call Tom and Harry exactly as brown as berries," went on Belle, laughing, "for I am not acquainted with many kinds of brown berries."

"Coffee berries?" hinted Darrin.

"I would call Tom and Harry fully as bronzed as Indians," Belle ventured.

"Have you ever seen any Indians?" asked Midshipman Darrin, looking at his sweetheart rather quizzically.

"Oh, haven't I?" laughed Belle Meade, her eyes sparkling. "We had Indians here the early part of this summer. There was a medicine

show here, with Indians and cowboys, and that sort of thing. One day the Indians and cowboys got intoxicated and they went through Main Street like a tornado. They were yelling and shooting, and had people all along the street running for cover. Even the chief of police, though he wasn't a coward, ran into safety.

"In the midst of it all Dick Prescott, Greg Holmes, Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton came out of an ice cream parlor. Tom and Harry got a glimpse of the very Wild West looking company of yellers and shooters. Tom and Harry have seen enough Indians and cowboys to know the real thing—and that these were only poor imitations. All of a sudden Tom and Harry and Dick and Greg charged into that howling, shooting crowd and knocked them right and left. Your four old-time chums simply disarmed the 'bad' ones and turned the weapons over to the chief of police."

Belle went on, describing the famous incident, while Dave leaned back, laughing heartily.

"How I wish I had been on hand! I'd like to have helped, too," he added.

"Those four youngsters didn't need any help," laughed Belle.

"Which was the most surprised crowd—the 'bad' Western outfit or the police department?" chuckled Dave.

Readers of our "West Point Series" will find the "Wild West" scene fully narrated in "Dick Prescott's Third Year at West Point."

"Isn't it outrageous," demanded Dave, "that the West Point and the Annapolis leave of absence should be so arranged that midshipmen and cadets who are old, old friends never get a chance to meet each other on furlough?"

"I don't suppose," replied Belle, "that it often happens that one little city often has the honor of furnishing, at the same time, two midshipmen for Annapolis and two cadets for West Point."

"Very likely not," nodded Dave. "But it seems too bad, just the same. What wouldn't I give to see Tom or Harry? Or Greg or Dick? And now that I'm here Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes are but just barely gone."

"Yes; they have been but four days gone," assented Belle. "It does seem too bad that you and your West Point chums couldn't have been one day together."

"I haven't seen a blessed one of the good old four since I left for Annapolis, more than two years ago," muttered Dave complainingly. "What wouldn't I give—just to see what they look like in these days?"

"Well, what would you give?" demanded Belle, rising and hesitating.

"They've given you their photos, then?" asked Dave Darrin guessing. "Please be quick—let me see the photos."

Belle glided from the room, to return with a large card.

"They were taken altogether," she explained, handing the card over to Darrin. "There they are—all in one group."

Dave seized the card, studying eagerly the print mounted thereon.

"Whew! What a change two years make in a High School boy, doesn't it?" demanded Darrin.

"Of course," answered Belle Meade. "Do you imagine that you and Dan Dalzell haven't changed any, either?"

Readers of our "High School Series" will well remember Dick Prescott, Greg Holmes, Tom Reade, Harry Hazelton, Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell, a famous sextette of young High School athletes, who, in their High School days, were known as Dick & Co.

Readers of the four volumes of that series will recall that Dick Prescott received the congressman's nomination to West Point, and that Greg Holmes was appointed a cadet at the same big government Army school by one of the state's senators. Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell, a little later, secured nominations to An-

napolis from the same gentlemen; and Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton, who had thrown their lot with civil engineering, had gone West to engage with an engineering firm of railroad builders.

From that passing of the old High School days the experiences and adventures of Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes are told in the volumes of "The West Point Series."

Those of Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton are set forth fully in "The Young Engineers' Series."

As for Dave Darrin and Dan, their life, since leaving the High School, and casting their lot with the Navy, has been fully told in the two preceding volumes of the present series, "Dave Darrin's First Year at Annapolis" and "Dave Darrin's Second Year at Annapolis."

"Well, I'll meet Dick and Greg this coming Thanksgiving, at any rate," predicted Midshipman Darrin. "You know what happens the Saturday after Thanksgiving on Franklin Field, don't you, Belle?"

"You young men of Annapolis and West Point play football, don't you?" asked Belle.

"Do we?" demanded Dave, his eyes aglow with enthusiasm. "Don't we, though. And, mark me, Belle, the Navy is going to carry away the Army's scalp this year."

"Are you going to join the team?" asked Belle.

"I can't say, until I get back. But I've been training. I hope to be called to the team. So does Dan."

"I hope you and Dan both make the eleven," cried Belle, "so that you can get away to see the game."

"Why, we can see the game better," retorted Dave, "if we don't make the team."

"Why, are midshipmen who don't belong to the eleven allowed to see the game?" asked Belle in some surprise.

"Are we?" demanded Dave. "Belle, don't you know what the Army-Navy game on the Saturday after Thanksgiving Day is like? The entire brigade of midshipmen and the whole corps of cadets travel over to Philadelphia. There, on Franklin Field, before an average of thirty thousand yelling spectators, the great annual game of the two great national academies is fought out."

"You haven't gone to see the annual game at Philadelphia before this, have you?" asked Miss Meade.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because, Belle, both years, at Thanksgiving time, Danny boy and I have found ourselves

so far behind in our studies that we just took the time to stay behind and bone, bone, bone over our books."

"And you think this year will be different?"

"Oh, yes; when a man is half way through Annapolis the studies become easier to him. You see, in two years of the awful grind a fellow, if he lasts that long, has learned how to study in the right way. I'm going to get two tickets, Belle, so that you and your mother can go to see the game. And of course good old Dick can do as much for Laura Bentley and her mother. You'll come, of course, to root your hardest for the Navy, just as Laura will go and root for the Army. By the way, have you heard whether Dick and Greg expect to play on the Army eleven?"

"When they were here this summer they said they hoped to play football with the Army. That's all I know, Dave, about the plans of Dick and Greg."

"I hope they do play," cried Midshipman Darrin cheerily. "Even with two such old gridiron war horses as Dick and Greg against us, I believe that the Navy team, this year, has some fellows who can take the Army scalp with neatness and despatch."

Dave rambled on, for some time now, with talk of the athletic doings at the Naval Acad-

emy. It was not that he was so much interested in the subject—at that particular moment—but it was certainly fine to have Belle Meade for an interested listener.

"Well, you're half way through your course," put in Belle at last. "You passed your last annual examinations in June."

"Yes."

"How did you stand in your exams.?"

"I came through with honors," Dave declared unblushingly.

"Honors?" repeated Belle delightedly. "Oh, Dave, I didn't know you were one of the honor men of your class."

"Yes," laughed Midshipman Dave, though there was a decidedly serious look in his fine face. "Belle, I consider that any fellow who gets by the examiners has passed with honors. So we're all honor men that are now left in the class. Several of the poor fellows had to write home last June asking their parents for the price of a ticket homeward."

"But, now that you've got half way through, you're pretty sure to go the rest of the way safely," Belle insisted.

"That's almost too much of a brag to make, Belle. The truth is, no fellow is safe until he has been commissioned as an ensign, and that's at least two years after he has graduated from

the Naval Academy. Why even after examination, you know, a fellow has to go to sea for two years, as a midshipman, and then take another and final examination at sea. A whole lot of fellows who managed to get through the Academy find themselves going to pieces on that examination at sea."

"And then——" went on Belle.

"Why, if a fellow can't pass his exams., he's dropped from the service."

"After he has already graduated from Academy? That isn't fair," cried Belle Meade.

"No, it isn't quite fair," assented Midshipman Dave, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Yet what is one going to do about it? It's all in the game—to take or leave."

"Who ever made the Naval Academy and the service so hard as that?" the girl wanted to know.

"Congress, I guess," laughed Dave, "but acting, very likely, on the advice of a lot of old admirals who are through themselves, and who expect the youngsters to know as much as the very admirals. Why, Belle, when I was a few years younger, and first began to dream about going to the Naval Academy I had a mental picture of a very jolly life, in which we sailed the seas and absorbed our knowledge. I had an idea that the midshipman's life was made

up mainly of jolly larks ashore and afloat, with plenty of athletics to keep us from ever feeling dull. Of course, I knew we had to do some studying, but I didn't imagine the studies would be hard for a chap who had already gone through a good High School."

"Your High School studies did help, didn't they?" demanded Belle.

"They helped somewhat in the exams. to enter Annapolis, but they've never helped me with any of the studies that I've had to tackle as a midshipman."

"Oh, well, you'll get through," the girl predicted with cheery confidence.

"I shall, if it's really in me," Dave promised. "But I'm not going to do any bragging, Belle, until I'm safely through and have been out of the woods for a long time."

"And you won't do any bragging then, either. It isn't in your line. What's Dan Dalzell going to do while he's home on leave?"

"Sleep, he says."

"The lazy boy!"

"No, he's a tired boy, Belle. I think the past year has been even just a little harder on him than it has on me. However, of course Dan won't really sleep. He'll be out by this afternoon. Just now I imagine that he's talking like wildfire with his mother."

It was a wrong guess, however. Just then the telephone sounded in the next room, and Belle went to answer it.

"It's your shipmate, Dan," she called laughingly. "He wants to talk with you, Dave."

"I wonder how the fellow ever guessed that I was here," smiled Darrin, as he hastily joined Belle at the 'phone.

"Hello," hailed Dalzel at the other end of the wire. "Going to do anything in particular this afternoon, David, little giant?"

"Yes; I hope to make myself more or less agreeable to Miss Meade."

"A small crowd won't be any bar to that, eh?" Dan wanted to know.

"Not if the crowd and the occasion are agreeable to Miss Meade."

"Well, you know Foss and Canty?"

"Two of our old High School boys? Yes."

"Foss has a new gasoline launch; he says it's a beauty, and he wants us to invite Miss Meade and Miss Bentley, to join them and a couple of the former High School girls for a couple of hours' cruise on the river. What say you?"

"What does Belle say, you mean. Wait a moment, and I'll ask her."

Darrin explained the invitation.

"Why, if it will be pleasant for you, Dave, I shall be delighted to go," Belle answered.

"It's all right," Dave called back over the 'phone. "What's the hour for the start?"

"Two o'clock," Dan answered.

"All right, then; will you ask Laura Bentley, or shall we, from here?"

"I've already asked Laura," Dalzell replied. "She accepted on condition that Belle did. Now I'll ring up Laura and tell her that it's all arranged."

"It'll be a pleasant trip for you, won't it?" inquired Belle, half-anxiously. "Or do you get too much of boats in your working year?"

"I shall be glad to be anywhere that you are," Dave replied gallantly. "The form of entertainment doesn't matter to me as long as it appeals to you."

At two o'clock the young people met at the float of the Boat Club house on the river's bank.

On the way across town Dave had been noting the direction and force of the wind. He didn't altogether like it, but didn't say anything. At the float he found Tom Foss, Ab Canty, Ella Wright and Susie Danes awaiting the midshipmen and their fair companions.

"All ready and waiting for you amateur sailors," called Foss laughingly. "And here's the boat. Say, isn't she really a beauty?"

"Good lines," nodded Dave Darrin. "And

she looks speedy. But you've changed your mind about going out this afternoon, haven't you, Foss?"

"Why?" demanded the young fellow, in very evident astonishment.

"Look at the water," responded Dave, pointing to the white-caps, which were running rather high for an inland stream.

"Pooh! You're not afraid of a little foam on top of the water, are you?" demanded Foss.

"The waves are running pretty high for the inches of freeboard that your boat has," remarked Darrin quietly. "And look at the sky to windward. There's a bit more blow coming out of those clouds yet."

"Say, what do they teach you at Annapolis?" grinned Foss. "To go sailing only in calm weather?"

"Since you ask," Dave replied as quietly as before, though a slight flush mounted to his face, "one of the things they teach us at the Naval Academy is consideration for women. Now, if just we four fellows were going out, I wouldn't say a word."

"Don't think we girls are afraid," broke in Belle with spirit.

"I'm well aware that you're not afraid," Darrin replied turning and looking at her. "But I'm afraid, Belle, of what I might think

of myself afterwards, if I were a party to taking you out in this boat when the river is running so much to whitecaps."

"Do you think the boat is one of the kind that will turn turtle and sink the crowd?" demanded Tom Foss, flushing in turn. "I tell you, Darrin, the craft is as tight and sound, and as manageable, as any boat of her length to be found anywhere on fresh water."

"She is a fine boat," Dave assented; "but I don't feel like being responsible for what may happen to the young lady who is more especially under my escort and care. There's too big a chance of danger this afternoon, Foss."

"Pooh, Mr. Sailor!" laughed Ella Wright. "I'll show you that some folks who don't know what Annapolis looks like are not frightened by toy waves."

Miss Ella thereupon stepped into the launch and seated herself. Miss Susie followed.

"Aren't you people going?" asked Ab Canty.

"I'm not going if Dave considers it so unwise that he'd be worried about our safety," Belle answered promptly.

"Going, Laura?" called Foss.

"No, though I thank you," Miss Bentley replied. "If Mr. Darrin objects on the score of safety I'm not going to torment him by disregarding his opinion."

"I'm of about the same opinion as Darrin, if anyone cares to know," broke in Dan Dalzell.

Tom Foss looked at the other half of his party quizzically, then called to Canty.

"Cast off, Ab. Ha, ha! I never thought to see United States sailors and embryo Naval officers so much afraid of a little tossing water."

Chug-chug! Ella and Susie were laughing a bit teasingly as the motor started and the little craft darted away from the float and took to the waves beyond.

Dave did not answer. Instead, he gripped Dan's nearer wrist, muttering:

"Don't you say it, Danny!"

"Say what?"

"Whatever hot words were coming to your lips. As long as we feel that we're right in not risking Belle and Laura, never mind what the others think and say."

"This breeze is so fine," suggested Laura, "what do you say if we seat ourselves here and watch the river for a while?"

Accordingly the four young people seated themselves. The launch was the only craft in sight that was away from her moorings. A sailboat and three canoes lay tied to the lee side of the float, that is the off-side from the weather. Even they rocked a good deal.

"What kind of weather is coming?" asked Belle.

"It's going to be pretty squally, in all probability," spoke up Midshipman Dan. "Do you see the big puffs of wind in the clouds yonder?"

"It must take a sailor to see that sort of thing," remarked Belle. "What I see in the cloud looks like big, fluffy masses of cotton, streaked with something darker."

"That's the wind," nodded Dave Darrin. "Now, girls, I don't want you to think me a muff. That wind may swerve, and not come this way, although in all probability the wind will get this way and the water will be rougher. If it does get rougher on the river, and if we had taken you two out, and the boat had capsized, then by some chance we might not have been able to get you to shore. What would your folks then say to us if we had had the miserable luck to survive you?"

"You did just right," Laura declared promptly. "To tell the truth, I didn't want to disappoint either of you boys this afternoon, but I didn't believe the wind was quiet enough for boating on the river. But mother reminded me that I was going with two young men who had been trained as sailors, and that I ought to be as safe as I would in the home parlor."

"Well, aren't you?" smiled Belle Meade.

"Did you really want to go out on the river, Belle?" Dave asked.

"Not when you don't believe it to be safe."

"I suppose Foss will be joking around town about our being afraid of the water," muttered Dan.

"What do you care?" asked Dave quietly. "You're responsible to the United States Government—not to a few private citizens on the streets of Gridley."

"You'll take us out on the water before your leave is over, won't you?" urged Belle.

"A dozen of times, if you care to go," Dave replied quickly.

"In a sailboat?" quizzed Belle. "It must be great fun to sail, and I've never been in a sailboat."

"I'd rather take you out in a good, solid rowboat," Dave answered slowly.

"Why, haven't you had much sailboat practice at Annapolis yet?"

"We've had some," Darrin nodded. "But I'm afraid I don't believe much in small sailboats for girls' parties."

"Oh, very well."

"Now, Belle, you will begin to believe that I'm a muff at heart," Darrin remonstrated.

"I won't anyway, Dave," Laura broke in. "I can see that you're merely determined that

we shall take no risks when we go out with you. I shall feel very safe in whatever you propose for water sports."

"It's a good deal better to be safe, than sorry, when you have girls under your care," Dan Dalzell added.

The motor boat, a fast though a low-hulled craft, had been long out of sight up the river. Presently there came a new turn to the wind. Dan wet a forefinger and held it up to the breeze.

"I hope Foss has sense enough to run in somewhere and tie up until the coming squall blows over," Dalzell remarked.

"Are we going to have a storm?" Belle asked quickly.

"Not rain, if that's what you mean," Darrin replied. "But I believe the river is going to be pretty rough before long."

Ere two minutes more had passed Dave suddenly rose and straightened himself.

"Look downstream, girls," he cried. "Do you see the big rollers coming?"

In truth the surface of the river was now beginning to behave in an unusual way. Where, heretofore, the water had been choppy and whitecapped, the water now broke in longer, foam-crested waves. Owing to the course of the wind the waves were rolling upstream.

Within five minutes from the time when Dave first called attention to the rougher water the waves had considerably increased in size.

"Oh, I'm glad I'm not out on the water," shivered Laura

"So am I," Belle admitted candidly.

"Do you believe Tom Foss can bring his boat down against such waves?" Laura inquired.

"Oh, no doubt, he has had sense enough to run in somewhere and tie up," predicted Midshipman Dan charitably.

"I hope so," murmured Belle. "But Tom is an awfully stubborn fellow."

Toot! too-oo-oot! sounded a whistle up the river.

"By ginger, there comes Foss's boat now!" muttered Dan, standing up and staring. "Why doesn't the idiot make land?"

"He's got his craft away on the other side of the river, looking for quieter water," muttered Dave uneasily.

"Well, isn't that right?" asked Belle.

"Right, yes, unless he makes the mistake of trying to cross the stream," nodded Darrin. "Then he'll run his craft into the trough of the sea, and——"

"Well, what?" demanded Belle as Dave paused.

"Then, when he's in the trough, a big wave

may roll his small boat over," Dan finished for his comrade.

"Do you really think there's danger of that?" demanded Laura, looking anxious.

"I don't know," murmured Dave. "But I wish I had some way of signaling Foss, some way so that he could understand the signals."

"What good would it do?" demanded Midshipman Dalzell, grimly. "Tom would only laugh and say it was more old maidishness on the part of Navy men."

"There—confound the idiot!" suddenly blazed Dave Darrin. "He is crossing. Look at that boat wallow in the trough. Jupiter! There she goes over—nearly!"

All four young people on the float held their breath for an instant. The motor launch, after almost having turned turtle, righted itself.

"I wish I were at the wheel of the boat for about three minutes," muttered Darrin hoarsely.

At that moment Laura and Belle both screamed, while Dan Dalzell shouted:

"There she goes—for sure, this time!"

A bigger wave than usual had half filled the launch and caused it to careen. Before the little craft could right itself a second and a third wave, rolling along, had completed the work. The launch had sunk!

CHAPTER II

PROVING THEIR TRAINING

IN the same instant, without a word to each other, Dave Darrin and Dalzell had done the same thing. That is, they started to run and at the same time doffed coats and vests, leaving these garments to flutter behind them.

As they reached the sailboat both midshipmen cast off their shoes. Dave leaped into the boat while Dalzell threw off the bowline, then boarded.

Like a flash both youngsters went at the lashings of the mainsail.

"There isn't a reef in," Dan discovered. "Going to take time for a close reef, Dave?"

"There isn't time," Darrin muttered, with drops of cold perspiration on his forehead as he toiled. "We'll have to go out under a full sail, Dan."

"Great Scott!" muttered Dalzell.

"We may be too late to save any one as it is. There! Jump to the halyard. I've got the sheet."

Dan Dalzell began to hoist with a will. In an incredibly short time he had the sail hoisted all

the way up, while Darrin, stern and whitefaced, crouched and braced himself by the tiller, gripping the sheet with his left hand.

In a twinkling Darrin had the wind in his canvas. They had nearly a fair wind as they bounded away from the float.

During these few instants of preparation neither Belle nor Laura had spoken. Both girls realized the gravity of the situation, and they knew that a word from them might distract the rescuers from the work in hand.

Knowing that he had the high, fast wind with him, Dave steered straight for the last spot where he had seen the motor launch. Though the boat was no longer visible, and the distance too great for seeing the heads of the swimmers, if there were any, Darrin had taken his bearings by trees on the further shore upstream.

At first, to keep the sailboat from capsizing, the young skipper at the helm let the sheet well out. Then, when Dan hurriedly rejoined him, Darrin passed the sheet over to his comrade as to one who would know exactly what to do with it. Dan perched himself on the weather gunwale, his weight there serving as ballast to keep the craft from capsizing. Yet, even so, everything had to be done with the utmost skill, for, with the mainsail up, the least fluke in handling the boat would send her over.

"We've got to go fast and take all the chances," muttered Dave.

"Sure," nodded Midshipman Dan understandingly. "It would be no great scare to us if we did heel over into the drink. It might mean a different story, though, for those who are already sopping up the wet."

"Aren't they splendid fellows?" cried Laura.

"Yes," answered Belle, her eyes snapping and her face glowing. "Though I won't claim that they're any finer than your own West Point boys."

That brought an added flush to the color in Laura Bentley's face, and her eyes sparkled her gratitude, for Dick Prescott, now at West Point with his chum, Greg Holmes, had been her High School sweetheart, and doubtless was to become her Army sweetheart after he had made sure of his career.

"Dave and Dan are experts," glowed Miss Bentley. "They'll know just what to do."

"They're better than mere experts," returned Belle Meade. "They're strong and manly to the core, and with them there's no such word as fear when there's a duty to be done."

Both Dave and Dan were peering fixedly ahead all the time that they drove the sailboat toward the scene of the late disaster.

"I think I see a head," cried Darrin.

"Boy or girl?" demanded Midshipman Dalzell.

"Can't tell at this distance. And now the next wave has blotted out what I thought I saw."

"We've got to be patient," uttered Dan.

The position of the midshipmen was far from being free of danger. With all their coolness and their undoubted skill in boat handling, there was grave danger, with the mainsail set, that, at any instant, wind and wave would capsize the boat.

Indeed, Dave was running the lee gunwale under water half the time, trusting to the human ballast supplied by his comrade to keep them afloat.

"See anything now?" demanded Dave.

"No," uttered Dan, "though I'm working my eyes three shifts to try to make out something. I'll have to go to an oculist as soon as I get through with this. This eyestrain is awful."

Midshipman Dan Dalzell was really unconscious of the fact that he was joking. It was second nature with him; he would have jested —unconsciously—with death in its most awful form.

"There, I see a head—two of them!" cried Midshipman Dave suddenly, as he half rose and pointed.

"Hurrah!"—from Dan.

Dan let the boat's head fall off a point in order that he might see better around the mast on the weather side, just where he must head his craft in the last dash in.

"It's Foss and Ella Wright," called Dan, as the flying sailboat got in closer over the foam-crested waves. "No, it isn't; Foss has Susie."

"Can you make out Canty and Ella?" demanded Darrin hoarsely.

"Not a sign, Dave. Maybe he's gone under trying to save Ella."

"Canty was one of our Gridley High School boys, so I'd expect him to have both the nerve and the grace to go down with a girl, if he couldn't save her as well as himself," muttered Darrin.

"There's Canty, just come up!"

"Can you make out Ella's head?"

"No."

"Look hard."

"I don't see her, and—there!"

"What's up?"

"Nothing," returned Dalzell soberly. "Canty's down—just gone down again."

"I hope he's gone down trying to find and rescue Ella," murmured Dave.

They were now so close that the young midshipmen would have been able to hear the shouts

of the imperiled ones had it not been that the wind blew the sounds of voices away from the would-be rescuers.

"Better ease off the sheet a bit, I guess, Davy," called Dan, as he suited the action to the word. "We don't went to run 'em down."

"No."

As he spoke, Dave Darrin brought the boat slightly around. They were now close enough to see that Tom Foss was supporting dead weight in the person of Susie, who was unconscious.

"Waiting the word from you on the sheet, Davy," nodded Dan, as the boat drew close to the only pair of survivors now visible.

"Let go the sheet!" called Dave an instant later, and Dan let it run off clear, handing the end of the rope to Darrin.

"Can you head Susie this way, Foss?" Dalzell called.

"I'd rather have help," came the faint answer. Tom Foss was evidently well spent by his exertions in keeping up the girl so long.

Splash! Dan Dalzell was in the water, without waiting to hear more. The athletic young midshipman swam with a steadiness and speed that was glorious to see. Many an excellent swimmer, in smooth water, would dread buffeting with such waves as were now rolling.

Dave Darrin, meanwhile, held on to the tiller and the paid-out sheet, ready to manœuvre the now pitching, rolling boat at an instant's notice. It took all his seamanship to keep the craft afloat, though the sailboat was far better modeled for such water than the motor launch had been.

"Give her over to me, and save yourself," commanded Dalzell cheerily, as he reached Tom Foss. "Think you can make it, old fellow?"

"If I can't, I ought to drown," retorted Tom Foss, as he struck out, none too strongly. "This is all my fault. You fellows gave me better advice than I had sense to follow."

Dan, with a skill that he had acquired directly from the excellent instruction given him by the swimming master at the Naval Academy, was now piloting the unconscious form of Susie Danes toward the sailboat.

Even encumbered as he was, Dan made the boat before Tom Foss could accomplish that feat alone. Truth to tell, Foss was very nearly "all in." Had rescue been delayed a few moments longer, Foss and his fair companion must have sunk.

"Get hold of her, Davy," called Dan, as he ranged up on the weather side of the tossing boat.

Darrin promptly leaned over and lifted the

unconscious girl into the boat. By the time he had done that Tom Foss reached up both hands, seizing the boat's stern.

"Going to help me in?" he called.

"I don't know," Dave answered dubiously. "If we can find Ella Wright there may not be room. With such a sea running, this boat won't hold many."

"No matter about me, then," muttered Tom. "If Ella isn't found right away I don't believe I care about going back to Gridley."

Dave's response was swiftly to knot a noose and let it down over Tom's shoulders. The other end of the line he made fast astern. Dalzell, in the meantime, had swum back again. Susie Danes lay as still as death in the bottom of the boat.

As Dalzell got back where he had first reached Foss and Susie, he espied the head of Ab Canty some distance away.

"Ab!" called Dan.

"Here!"

"What has become of Ella?"

"Oh, I wish I knew!"

"Was she afloat at all?" demanded Dan, swimming nearer.

"Yes; I kept her up for a couple of minutes, maybe. Then she got more scared, wound her arms tight around me, and we both sank. We

had a struggle under water. I freed myself, but when I came to the top I found that my hand was clutching nothing but her empty jersey. There it is now," chattered Ab, his teeth knocking against each other, as he pointed to the garment in question on the top of a distant wave. Then Ab sank.

For just an instant Dalzell thought Canty had gone below on purpose. Dan swam closer, to be of assistance. Then he saw the bubbles of air coming up rapidly.

"Canty's given out—he's going to drown!" gasped Midshipman Dan, with horror.

Like a flash Dan dived below, found and clutched at Canty. The young man returned the grip with interest, but Midshipman Dalzell struggled to the surface with him. Ab Canty was exhausted, out of his head and altogether past reasoning. Dan hated to do it, but he had to strike the young man in the forehead. Canty gave a gasp and ceased to resist.

Dave Darrin, watching, had run the boat up close alongside as soon as the struggling pair appeared above the waves.

"You'll have to take him in, Davy," announced Midshipman Dalzell. "Canty isn't strong enough to tow behind. And I'm coming aboard for a fresh look before I dive for Miss Wright."

"You're going to stay aboard and manage the boat," retorted Darrin quietly. "I'm going in next."

"Oh, all right, if you want to," half grumbled Dan. "But I'm just beginning to get used to it and to like it."

Dan, however, followed orders and took his seat by tiller and sheet as soon as they had towed Canty safely in the boat. Tom Foss, tied and holding on at the stern, was beginning to chatter hard, but said he was all right.

A brief instant of consultation the two midshipmen held. Then Dave Darrin, holding his hands before him, dived hard and deep into the water.

After nearly a minute he came up again, but only to take an observation. Then he sank, to explore more of the space under water.

For five minutes Darrin continued this, making four dives in all, and sinking twice without diving.

"I can't give this up, and abandon a girl," he muttered. "Dan, I've got to take more account of the current, and work gradually downstream."

A little later Dave rose with a whoop the instant that his head showed above the water.

"I've got her," Dave announced, though his voice was hoarse and panting.

"Hurrah!" came from Dan, as he saw the girl's head show above the surface. Dalzell, hauling on the sheet, ran the boat in close. Dave grasped at the rail on the weather quarter, while Dan bent over him, hauling hard. And so Ella Wright was dragged unconscious into the boat.

"I'd stay here in the water with you, Tom," explained Dave, "but I've got to be in the boat to do my share of handling her."

"Th-th-that's all r-r-r-r-right," chattered poor Foss. "I'm d-d-d-doing f-f-f-fine here—c-c-c-couldn't h-help in the b-b-b-boat."

While lying to, it had taken some fine management on the part of the midshipmen to keep the sailboat from capsizing. And now, on this rough, wave-strewn river, they had to tack back against a nearly head wind.

"Look at the crowd on the clubhouse float," gasped Dan as soon as the Naval chums had gotten their craft under way.

"Good thing," muttered Darrin. "We'll need plenty of help."

"I wonder how the crowd got wind of the thing in such short time?"

"You forget," nudged Darrin, "that there's a telephone in the clubhouse. Laura and Belle are not given to losing their heads. Undoubtedly they've been 'phoning to Gridley."

"Then they can't have overlooked the need

of physicians," ventured Dan, "especially as Laura is the daughter of one."

As the boat drew nearer to the float the noise of cheers was borne to the ears of the midshipmen.

"More of the hero racket," uttered Dan disgustedly.

"I hope this won't get into the newspapers," grunted Darrin in a tone of something like real alarm. "Say, the fellows of the brigade wouldn't do a thing but make us mount chairs and read all the fulsome gush about this rescue."

"And then, after we'd finished a straight reading," groaned Dan, "we'd have to sing it next, to the tune of 'Columbia, the Pride of the Ocean.'"

"'Gem of the Ocean,' Dan," Darrin corrected.

Though in the middle of the river the sailboat had many a close shave from capsizing in the strong puffs of wind, especially with the load that the little craft carried, yet Dan Dalzell, at the tiller, brought the boat at last in under the lee side of the float, and there a score of pairs of willing hands reached out with offers of help.

Dr. Bentley was in the crowd, as were two other Gridley physicians. There were also two

trained nurses, and one of the druggists had brought along a big emergency box of drugs and supplies. Between them the telephone and the automobile can accomplish a lot in these modern times.

Laura and Belle, though they had summoned the aid, now kept tactfully in the background.

The two apparently drowned girls were lifted from the boat in haste and borne to a room that had been made ready on the second floor of the clubhouse. Ab Canty was carried to another room, and Tom Foss, who nearly shook to pieces when lifted from the water, was helped after his friend.

"You two young midshipmen will have to come inside and get some of our attention," called Dr. Bentley in an authoritative voice.

"I think not, thank you, doctor," replied Dave Darrin. "The most that we want is some place where we can strip and rub down, while waiting for dry clothing."

"I know just the room, and I'll take you there," urged Len Spencer, reporter for the "Morning Blade." Len was an old friend of Dick Prescott, who, in his High School days before going to West Point, had worked as an amateur space reporter for the "Blade."

Len led the way gladly. While Dan and Dave stripped and rubbed down, Len got out of them

the whole account of what they had been through. Reporter Spencer had already talked with Belle and Laura. A man in an auto had already started for the homes of the two midshipmen, to obtain changes of clothing for them.

"Now, Len," begged Dave, "don't spread on a lot of taffy. Don't smother us under the hero racket."

"But it was an heroic thing," Len argued. "And, besides, it was done with great skill, of the kind that you've gained at the Naval Academy. It makes a corking, elegant story about two of our brightest Gridley lads."

"But, Len, do you realize that the fellows at the Naval Academy will make us read aloud to them this yarn you're proposing to write about us—that is, if they happen to hear about it?"

"And then, after we've read the yarn straight, they'll make us sing it all to some blamed old tune or another," groaned Dalzell.

"Well, I can't help it," sighed good-natured Len. "It's a story we've got to have to-morrow morning. I'd lose my position if I didn't write a good story about this afternoon's work. And, now that I've got a wife and baby to feed, I can't afford to waste any good time in job-hunting."

"Then I hope none of the other fellows at the Naval Academy hear about the 'Blade's' story,"

gulped Dan, as he wrapped himself in a blanket while waiting for his dry clothes.

"Hear about it?" retorted Len. "They'll hear about it, all right. The Associated Press man at Gridley will be sure to send something about it to the papers all over the country."

"I guess we've got to take our medicine, Danny," hinted Midshipman Dave Darrin.

In the meantime Tom Foss was soon comfortable, wrapped up in blankets and with plenty of coffee inside him. Nor did it take long to bring Ab Canty around. In three quarters of an hour Susie Danes opened her eyes.

As for Ella Wright, the physicians and nurses worked over her long and earnestly, and were on the point of giving her up when at last a flutter of her eyelids was seen.

By night time all of the young people were quite out of danger, but the parents of the Wright and Danes families were highly indignant over the recklessness of Tom Foss in taking the girls out on the river in such a heavy wind.

Three days later even the launch was saved; that is, it was raised and was towed to a boat-builder for overhauling and repairs.

CHAPTER III

THE TROUBLE-MAKING FOP

THE story that Len Spencer wrote for the "Blade" was "worse" than the midshipmen had expected. That is, the newspaper made them out to be heroes of some rare, solid-gold type. To add to the trouble, the story, in a condensed form, was printed broadcast by the dailies all over the country.

"We can't hope to keep it quiet, Danny boy," groaned Dave when the two chums met the next morning.

"No," sighed Dan. "The most we can hope for is to be allowed to live it down."

"And I'm much afraid that we've got to stand for a lot more of gush this afternoon," continued Darrin.

"At the reception? Oh, yes! I wish we could desert the town and get away somewhere to hide."

The affair for the afternoon was a reception for which Laura Bentley had sent out hurried invitations to a lot of the former High School boys and girls of Gridley. Though Laura was more especially interested in the U. S. Military Academy at West Point—because Dick Prescott

was there—yet she did not show undue partiality to the Army.

"I'm sorry Laura didn't wait a fortnight," Dan continued.

"Oh, well, she doesn't understand," Dave urged.

"You're going, of course?"

"I surely am. I wouldn't slight that splendid girl. She's a whole lot to me, Danny boy, both for her own sake and Dick Prescott's."

Even the short stroll, however, between Belle Meade's home and Laura's, was bound to bring Dave Darrin again into the unwished-for limelight.

He and Belle had turned into Main Street together, and were walking along, chatting, when Belle's eyes flashed suddenly.

"There's that horrid wretch Ardmore," she murmured in an undertone.

"Don't believe I know him," Darrin returned.

"Then you haven't been deprived of much," replied Belle, in a tone that was very nearly bitter. "I've been meaning to tell you about him, Dave, but other matters have been cropping up and it has escaped me until now."

"What's wrong with Ardmore?" asked Dave.

"He's posing as an admirer of mine."

"I can't quarrel with his taste," smiled Darrin.

"But he annoys me."

"Has he dared to do that?" demanded Dave, a quick flash in his eyes.

"Not in any way that it would be easy to resent," Belle assured him.

"Who is this fellow Ardmore?"

"He appears to be a gentleman—at least in his ordinary conduct," Belle Meade answered. "He moved here last spring with his parents. The father is a retired lawyer, and wealthy. The Ardmores move in a rather good set in town. About a month ago Caspar Ardmore, the young man, met me at a church affair. Ever since then he has all but waylaid me. Several times he has tried to walk with me when we met, and has often tried to see me home from church or elsewhere. I've been almost downright rude to him, and have shown him in every way I can that I don't wish to continue acquaintance. But he's hard to discourage."

"He hasn't insulted you?" asked Dave quietly.

"Oh, dear, no! If he had, I think I might have been able to startle him somewhat," laughed Belle, who had a "temper" when it was necessary to have one. As she spoke she raised her eyes, glancing ahead.

"There, he has stopped, and looks almost as though he were waiting for us," she added.

"There's an ugly scowl on his face, too."

Dave Darrin looked ahead at the foppish, rather good-looking, tall and slender young man of some twenty-six years.

"I hope he isn't going to be troublesome," murmured Dave. "I don't want to have to fight with him—at least, not when you're along with me."

As they neared Ardmore, Dave continued to look at the young man quietly, steadily, frankly. Ardmore seemed trying to ignore the gaze, and looked, instead, at Belle.

Just as the young couple reached him, Ardmore raised his hat, at the same time stepping forward so that he blocked Belle's progress.

"Good afternoon, Miss Meade," was Ardmore's greeting. "I was on my way to your house when I saw you. Mother has some tickets for a concert at the Sorosis rooms, and is unable to use them this afternoon. So I have come to ask you if you will not honor me with your company at the concert?"

"Thank you, no," Belle answered coldly. "And I would also like to make it plain, Mr. Ardmore, since you make it necessary, that I do not wish your company at any time or place. I am sorry to have to speak so plainly."

A deep flush dyed the cheeks of the fop. But he was not so easily discouraged.

"I had intended to call this evening, Miss Meade. I am to have a box at the theatre."

"You may call anywhere you wish," Belle retorted, her eyes flashing, "provided it is not at my home."

"Oh, I am very much afraid that you are annoyed with me," cried Ardmore.

"I am," Belle admitted. "Mr. Ardmore, will you do me the very great favor of ceasing your attempts at acquaintance?"

"Acquaintance? Why, we're already very well acquainted, Miss Meade; in fact, I had hoped that we were, by this time, the most excellent friends. If this gentleman," with a sidelong look at Dave, "will excuse us, Miss Meade, will you stroll along with me and tell me in what way I may have offended you without intending anything of the sort?"

Dave, who had remained quiet, now felt called upon to interpose.

"Sir," he demanded, "will you observe Miss Meade's request and take yourself away?"

"And what have you to say about this?" demanded Ardmore sneeringly.

"The young lady is under my protection."

"I have offered her mine."

"And Miss Meade has just told you that you will please her most by keeping away from her at all times," replied Darrin quietly but firmly.

"What? After all the good times she and I have enjoyed together?" demanded Ardmore, as though astounded beyond measure.

"I? Good times with you?" cried Belle, her cheeks flaming. "I've never even spoken to you when I could avoid it."

"That's false!" cried young Ardmore hotly.

"Stop, right there!" warned Dave Darrin in a quieter voice than ever, though his face paled swiftly. "Did I understand you to remark that Miss Meade had made a false statement?"

"You did!"

Whack! Darrin's clenched right fist caught the fop on the temple, felling him to the ground.

"Go right on to Laura's, Belle," begged Dave quickly. "I'll be along soon."

Miss Meade walked rapidly ahead.

Ardmore was on his feet in an instant. Not wanting in a certain amount of animal courage, he rushed at Dave, only to be met with a blow in the mouth that floored him again. The fop's lip was cut and bleeding when he rose.

"You cur!" bellowed the fellow.

"The opinion of a person like you can't matter very much," Dave retorted coolly.

A little crowd was beginning to gather. Dave's pallor increased, for his very soul writhed at the thought of having Belle's name involved in a brawl in this fashion.

"You're a——" began Ardmore, but Dave Darrin moved quickly up to him.

"Do you retract the statement you made?" demanded the midshipman in a low voice.

"I retract nothing," quivered Ardmore. "I repeat, and repeat——"

Dave closed in like lightning. Ardmore attempted to guard himself, but he was all but helpless before such a fast, trained hitter as Dave. The fop went down under two well-aimed blows delivered almost together.

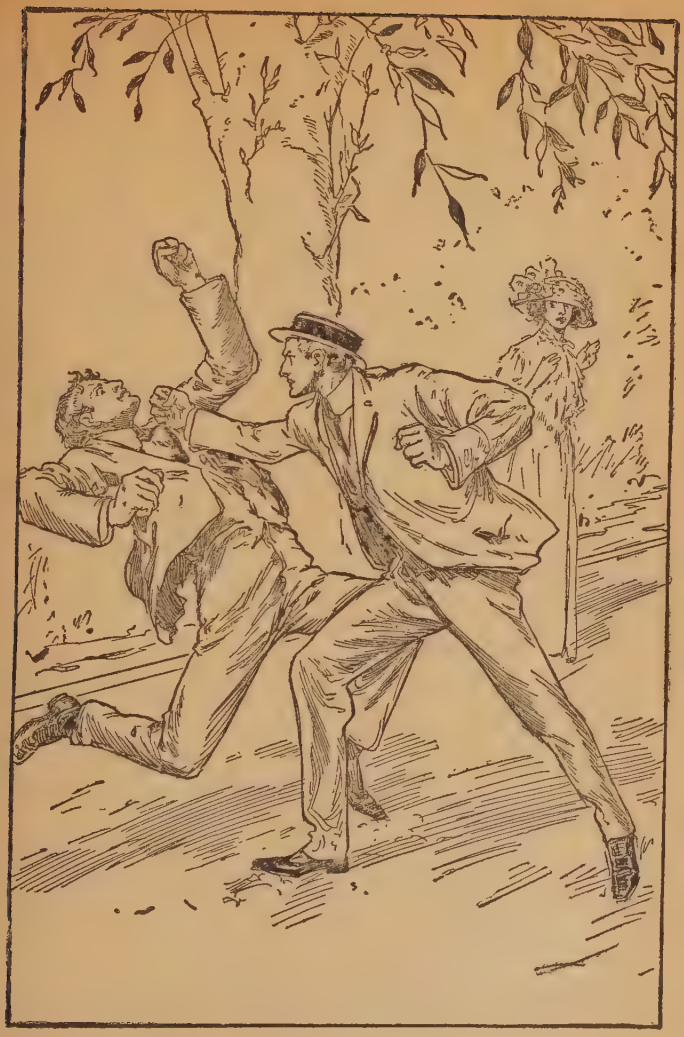
Once more Ardmore leaped to his feet, while Darrin disdainfully awaited him.

But two or three men in the crowd leaped between the enemies, forcing the fop back.

"Don't be a fool, Ardmore!" urged one of the men, speaking in the fellow's ear. "That's Midshipman Dave Darrin, and he's one of the quickest, hardest hitters in Gridley."

"Oh, that's the midshipman, is it?" demanded Ardmore in a sneering voice. "Oh, well, then, I won't hit him again. I know another way of making his skin smart."

Dave tarried only long enough to make sure that the fop did not care to carry the encounter further. Then, turning on his heel, he walked rapidly in the direction Belle had taken. He overtook that young lady before she reached the Bentley home.



Darrin's Blow Felled the Fop to the Ground.

"If the fellow intends to trouble you again, I hope he'll do it before my leave is finished," spoke Dave quietly. "I think I've given him a little lesson, Belle, though there's no telling how long it will last with inferior animals of Ardmore's type."

"He's a spiteful fellow, Dave. You must be on your guard against him," Belle urged.

"I guess Ardmore is wishing his own guard had been more effective," smiled the midshipman.

Caspar Ardmore was "busy" within an hour after Dave's summary handling of him. Ardmore had never been considered a truly bad fellow, though he was foppish, conceited and wholly unable to understand why anything that he wanted should be denied him. Belle was now two years beyond her High School days, and had developed into a most attractive young woman. Ardmore had fallen victim to her charms and had decided that he would make a better husband for her than any Naval officer could. Hence the young dandy had pursued Miss Meade with his attentions; upon finding her with Dave, he had hoped, in his foolish way, to put an end to Darrin's pretensions.

Ardmore, therefore, having met only disaster, was now engaged in drawing up a complaint to be sent to the Secretary of the Navy, complain-

ing that he had been set upon and treated with severe physical violence by Midshipman Darrin.

Nor was there great difficulty in finding three men, out of the small crowd that had witnessed the assault, to swear to affidavits that they had seen Darrin knock Caspar Ardmore down repeatedly.

All this "evidence" Ardmore got together with great relish, and mailed the mass of stuff, that same night, to the Secretary of the Navy at Washington.

Then Ardmore went out of town for three days. Behind him he left an active toady who promised to keep watch of matters and to advise him.

It was through this toady that Dave received an intimation that his case would be attended to at Washington. Belle, also, received a hint, and with it she went to Darrin.

"Can the fellow really make any trouble for you, Dave?" she asked anxiously.

"Why, yes," admitted Dave. "Anyone can make trouble for a midshipman, to the extent that the charge must be investigated by the Navy Department. If the Secretary were satisfied that I am a reckless sort of bully, he would decide that I am unfit to be an officer of the Navy."

CHAPTER IV

IN THE VIEW OF THE NAVY DEPARTMENT

DAVE DARRIN did not let the news of the charges disturb his outward serenity, though he was inwardly aware that perjured evidence might work great harm to his future career.

Until he was advised by the Navy Department that charges had been made against him, he really could do nothing in the matter.

But that letter from the Secretary was not long in coming. The letter informed Midshipman Darrin that he has been accused of severely assaulting a citizen without just provocation, and contained, also, some of the circumstances alleged by Caspar Ardmore. Dave was commanded to forward his defense promptly.

This Darrin did, in a courteous answer, as briefly as he could properly make it. He admitted knocking Ardmore down, but stated that he did it in resenting an insult offered by Ardmore to a young lady under his (Darrin's) escort at the time.

This letter he showed Belle.

"It is the first step, on my side, in the matter," he explained with a smile.

"I should think the Secretary of the Navy ought to be satisfied with your answer and drop it at once," replied Belle.

"He may."

"But you think he won't?"

"It is likely, Belle, that there will be a court of inquiry at least."

"Oh, dear!" cried Belle, a few tears gleaming in her eyes now. "Why should so much fuss be made over the matter?"

"Because I am being trained to be an officer in the Navy. An officer must be a gentleman as well. Any charge affecting a Naval officer's honor or courtesy must be investigated, in order that the government may know whether the accused is fit to hold an officer's commission. The government wouldn't be dealing justly with the people if such standards were not observed."

"And I am the cause of all this trouble for you?" cried Belle.

"No, Belle, you are not. You have nothing to do with the matter, except indirectly. Ardmore is the one responsible for the trouble. If he had not insulted you he wouldn't have gotten into any difficulty."

"It seems too bad, just the same."

"It's annoying; that's all," Dave assured her. "If I had to do the same thing over again, for the same reason, I'd do it cheerfully."

Mrs. Meade heard of it all, from her daughter. Without saying a word as to her intentions the mother herself wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Navy. Mrs. Meade set forth the persistent fashion in which Ardmore had sought to force his attentions upon Belle, to the latter's great annoyance. Mrs. Meade's letter declared that Darrin had taken the only possible means of saving Belle from future annoyance. The mother's letter to the Secretary concluded by offering to procure statements from other people on the subject if the Secretary wished.

Mrs. Meade received a prompt reply from Washington. The Secretary thanked her for her statements and expressed entire belief in them.

By the same mail Caspar Ardmore, just returned to Gridley, received this letter:

"Referring to your letter and complaint bearing date of September 6, the Department has to advise you that other statements have also been received bearing upon your accusations of an assault alleged to have been committed upon your person by Midshipman David Darrin.

"It is claimed by the signers of other statements, including that of Midshipman Darrin, that you grossly insulted a young woman under his escort and completed the insult by accusing her of falsehood. If these statements be true,

and there be no other important circumstances, except the assault, the Department begs to advise you that, had not Midshipman Darrin resented the gross insult tendered the woman under his protection, he would thereby, by such inaction, have rendered himself liable to dismissal from the Navy. It is always the first duty of a gentleman to afford ample protection to any woman under his escort and care.

"Should you deny the statements quoted above in favor of Midshipman Darrin, and should you further desire to have the matter brought to issue before a duly appointed court of inquiry, before which you would be required to appear as a material witness, this Department will be glad so to be advised. If you do not make formal application for the appointment of such court of inquiry within the next few days, no further action will be taken in the matter.

Very respectfully,

"Your obedient servant,

"(Signed) LEON B. CHAMBERS,

"*Secretary of the Navy.*"

As he read, and realized how flat his charge had fallen, Ardmore's face passed through several shades of red.

"Of all the government red tape!" he muttered wrathfully. "I didn't think the fool Secretary would do anything like this. I thought

he'd just call Darrin down hard and plenty, and perhaps bounce him out of the Naval Academy. Humph! I guess all these Navy folks stand together. There doesn't seem to be much justice about it."

Ardmore thereupon took another vacation away from Gridley. A few days after he went Midshipman Darrin received a brief communication from the Secretary of the Navy, stating that no further action had been taken by the accuser, and that the Department was satisfied that the midshipman's conduct had been fully justified. Therefore the matter would not be called to the attention of the Naval Academy authorities for action.

"So you see," smiled Dave, as he called at Belle's home and handed her the letter, "there is never any need to be worried until trouble breaks in earnest."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Belle, her eyes shining with delight. "I hope you won't meet that Ardmore fellow again while you're home."

"If I do," promised Dave, "I shall merely look over his head when we meet, unless he repeats the offense that brought him that thrashing."

Ardmore, however, did not appear in Gridley again during Dave's leave of absence.

Dave and Dan tasted, to the full, the delights

of life in the old home town until the day when it was necessary for them to take train and return to Annapolis.

"Mother, Laura and I will go down to Annapolis whenever we hear from you as to the best time for coming," Miss Meade promised at the railway station.

Then she found chance to murmur, in a voice too low for any of the others present to hear:

"And I'll try hard not to be such a goose as I was last winter!"

She referred to the trouble that had been made by another girl at Annapolis, the circumstances of which are wholly familiar to the readers of the earlier volumes of this series.

"I don't blame you for the way you felt last winter," Dave assured her heartily. "Next time, however, I hope you'll come to me first for an explanation."

"There isn't going to be any next time, Dave."

Three minutes later two midshipmen were being whirled through the city limits of Gridley.

CHAPTER V

NAVY FOOTBALL IN THE AIR

BACK on the old, familiar Academy grounds!

Both Dave and Dan underwent an unconscious brace as they passed the watchman at the main gate and stepped on, each with a suit case in hand, to the left, with Bancroft Hall in the distance.

Their first move was, as it must be, to report their return to the officer in charge. By that officer the two midshipmen were assigned to the rooms that they were to occupy during the coming academic year.

Once behind their doors, both young men hastened to get out of cit. clothes and back into their beloved uniforms.

"There are worse liveries to wear than Uncle Sam's," murmured Dan Dalzell when, having arrayed himself, he glanced down lovingly at the neat, dark blue.

"Much worse," replied Dave briefly, as, having dressed, he set to work to help make their quarters neat enough to please even the captious eye of the discipline officer. By the time that the two midshipmen finished policing their quar-

ters no housekeeper in the land could have found the least sign of disorder.

Rap-tap! sounded briskly at the door.

"Come in," called Dave.

The door opened, revealing Midshipman Hepson, of the first class.

"Are you fellows to rights?" he called.

"Come in, Hepson," urged Dave. "Yes; we're to rights as far as quarters go."

Hepson came no more than inside the door before he halted, asking briskly:

"Have you anything on?"

"Nothing but our clothes," grinned Dan, "and some hair."

"You've no appointments or engagements, then?" persisted Hepson. "My being here won't interfere with anything that you want to do?"

"Not in the least," Dave replied.

"Oh, then, I'll invite myself to a chair," declared the first classman, suiting the action to the word. "Now, you fellows can guess why I'm here."

"You're captain of this year's football eleven," Dave replied. "Has that anything to do with your call?"

"Everything," admitted Hepson briskly. "Have you fellows any notion that we've a poor eleven, so far, this year?"

"Why I thought it pretty good, from the practice work that I saw done in August," Darrin answered slowly.

"A pretty good eleven doesn't win games, sir," retorted Hepson. "Man, we've got to strengthen the team all along the line, or I'll go down in Naval Academy history as captain of the worst lot of dubs who ever chased a pigskin around the field!"

"Is it as bad as that?" demanded Dan, opening his eyes.

"Dalzell," said Hepson, "our eleven is rotten, sir—simply and fiercely useless!"

"If it's as bad as that," hinted Dan innocently, "wouldn't it be a prime good idea to draw our eleven from the field this year?"

"What? Strike the Navy's colors, and especially to the Army?" glared Mr. Hepson. "What are you talking about?"

"Then I guess," nodded Dan, "that we'll have to stay in the ring, and let it go by apologizing to the Army for getting in their way on the field the Saturday after Thanksgiving."

"We won't do that, either, by Jingo!" retorted Midshipman Hepson. "But we've got to strengthen our team. We've got to practise every minute that the commandant will allow us for practice. We've got to make a front-rank team out of—nearly nothing!"

"Aren't there any good players who have been holding back?" asked Dave Darrin.

"Two that I know of, Darrin," rejoined Hepson, fixing his eyes keenly on Dave.

"Who are they?"

"You and Dalzell."

"We haven't backed out, or refused duty," Darrin retorted quickly.

"No; but you haven't pushed yourselves forward any, either."

"Well, we're hardly team material," objected Dave modestly. "However, I'll promise for myself and Dalzell, too, that we'll turn out to all the practice we can, and work like blazes!"

"Will you?" cried Midshipman Hepson delightedly. He jumped up, grasping each midshipman by the hand in turn.

"But you don't want to bank on us too much," Darrin continued. "You know, we've never played on anything as big as the Navy team. We used to be good enough little players on a country school team. But it's different here."

"Let the coaches and the captain find that out, then," grunted Hepson. "But you'll work? You'll try to make good? You'll try to make the team and some history?"

"We'd lay down our lives for the Navy, at any point and in any sort of game," rejoined Dave Darrin simply.

"Good! Bully! That's the way I like to hear a fellow talk!" glowed Hepson, making toward the door. "You'll turn out for practice to-morrow afternoon?"

"Without fail, if we're physically able," promised Midshipman Darrin.

"Awfully obliged to you, fellows," cried Hepson, throwing the door open. "And now you won't mind if I cut my visit short? I've a lot of fellows to see, you know."

The door banged and Hepson was gone.

"Say, how's the Navy going to win under a chap as nervous as Hepson?" asked Dan.

"That isn't nervousness, Danny boy."

"If it isn't, what is it, then?"

"Electricity."

"Elec—— Oh, say, now——"

"It's electricity," Dave insisted. "He's a live wire, that man Hepson. He'll pull us through on the field this year, if any one can."

"There's nothing like looking on the bright side of things," murmured Dalzell, drumming on his chair.

"I'd rather see Hepson under estimate the Navy team," went on Dave, "than feel too sure that it is invincible. Still, I believe that the Navy is going to put forward a mighty strong eleven this year. Though, of course, that is not saying that we can beat the Army."

"Why not?" demanded Dalzell almost fiercely.

"Because, no matter how good a line we put forward, the Army may put forward a better."

"Now, don't go tooting the Army's bugle!"

"I am just considering the average of chances," Darrin returned. "Danny boy, sometimes the Navy wins, but most of the games of past years have gone to the Army. So the chances are that we'll be beaten this year."

"Not if I have to die on the line to stop it!" glowed Dalzell at red heat.

"Maybe you won't even get on the Navy line; perhaps I won't, either, Danny boy. But you know we saw by the "Army and Navy Journal" that Prescott and Holmes are playing on the West Point eleven this year."

"Holmes isn't necessarily such a much, is he?" flared Dan.

"Greg Holmes is a pretty handy man on the football field," retorted Darrin warmly. "None ought to know that better than we, after we've seen Holmes pull out so many victories for the old High School team. Of course, Prescott is the better player, but Holmes can back him up to amazing advantage."

"Didn't we play about as good a game as that pair?" Dalzell demanded.

"I don't know," Dave answered thoughtfully. "Perhaps not quite as good a game. You see,

in the old High School days, Dick Prescott used to lead and I often backed up his plays. So one could hardly compare us."

"If you're in such a blue funk over the Navy's chances, you'd better keep off the line-up," muttered Midshipman Dalzell.

"Oh, I'm in no funk," returned Darrin, smiling. "However, I'm not going to be betrayed into any bragging until we've wiped the field up with the Army—if we can."

Rap-tap! came on the door.

"I'll wager that's Farley," whispered Darrin.

"Or Page"—from Dan.

"Come in," called Dave.

The door opened, to let in Farley, with Page crowding on his heels.

Dave and Dan both hastened forward to clasp hands with these tried chums of other days.

"Seen Hepson?" asked Dan.

"Yes," nodded Farley. "He told us he had gobbled you. Hepson just left us."

"You're going to be on the eleven?" pressed Dan.

"If we can make it," nodded Farley slowly. "I'd like to play, too, but I'm hoping that the Navy can hit on some one better than myself."

"Cold feet?" grinned Dan.

"Not exactly," Farley answered, with a slight flush. "But it's a big thing to play on the

Navy's fighting eleven. It seems almost too big a responsibility for any but a demi-god."

"Demi-gods don't play football," jeered Dan. "They're nothing but idols, anyway, and they're two thousand years out of date. What we want on the Navy line is real human flesh and blood."

"There'll be blood on the doorstep of the moon if the Army carries things away from us this year," predicted Page mournfully.

"Well, all we can do is our best," declared Dave. "We'll do that, too, and do it mightily. Wow! What's that?"

Ta-ra-ra-ta-ra-ta! sounded musically in the corridors.

"Supper formation, by Jove!" gasped Dan.

Farley and Page fled without a word. Soon the "decks" of Bancroft Hall swarmed with young life. Then, outside, to seaward, the brigade fell in by companies.

Military commands rang out briskly, roll was called, reports made and the brigade marched in to supper.

What a joyous, noisy affair it was. Some license in the way of boisterousness was allowed this evening, and most of the young men took full advantage of the fact.

Swat! A slice of bread, soaked in a glass of water and kneaded into a soppy ball, struck Dalzell full in the back of the neck, plastering

his collar and sending a sticky mess down his spine.

"I'll fight the man who did that," promised Midshipman Dan, wheeling around. Then added cautiously:

"If he's a graduate."

There being, naturally, no graduates present except the officer at the furthest corner of the mess hall, Dan's challenge provoked laughter.

Many other pranks were played, but there is not room to record them here. The meal over and the brigade dismissed, some of the midshipmen—there were nearly eight hundred of them—went to their own quarters, or visited the rooms of cronies. Hundreds took the air in the grounds.

Almost the sole topic was football. Hepson speedily had most of the members of the big squad gathered about him. Others, who could not hope to "make" in football, gathered near-by, as though afraid of losing some of the talk.

"Remember, gentlemen, until the Army game is over, it's to be nothing this year but work, work, work!" warned Midshipman Hepson, with intense earnestness.

With nothing but football in the air, Dan soon caught the infection even more deeply than his chum.

"Hang it, I'm a dub," groaned Dan. "Lots of the fellows gave up their leave in order to be here and practise. Why in the mischief didn't I?"

"For the same reason that perhaps I didn't sacrifice leave," replied Dave. "I wasn't asked to. And you weren't, either, were you?"

"No; but I wish I had flung myself at Hepson's head, and made him take me, instead of going off to Gridley like a deserter! It's October now, and what earthly chance, Dave, have you and I to get in shape?"

"We'll do our best, Danny boy, or stay off the line. There's nothing to be gained by losing our heads. Regrets will be equally worthless."

"Hepson," called one midshipman, "has anyone invented the Navy yells for this year?"

"Yells?" repeated the football captain scornfully. "It's more to the purpose to fit ourselves to do something worth yelling about!"

"Has Hepson got the blues?" asked another midshipman.

"Or only the rattles?"

Football was still in the air, dominating the minds of the midshipmen when a turn of the master switch shut off the lights at taps.

CHAPTER VI

THE HATE OF A RIVAL

THE day following was one of intense, almost complicated routine.

There were books and supplies to be drawn for the new academic year. There were uniforms and other articles of apparel to be drawn. The sections were detailed and section marchers to be appointed. There were details of military organization to be announced. Some of the young men had to go up for physical examination, even if only of the eyes.

At the afternoon recreation hour Hepson led the big football squad out to the field. Hundreds of midshsipmen went there to see how the Navy would show up in the vitally important tests. At the outset Hepson was everywhere, like a buzzing, excitable wasp. Nor did he prove to be minus a sting at times.

"I think, sir," suggested Hepson, going over to Lieutenant-Commander Havens, the head coach, "that it would be well for us to know something about the running speed of every candidate."

"Very good, Mr. Hepson; try out any man that you're curious about," replied the officer.

"Darrin, Dalzell, Page, Farley, White, Bryant," called the captain of the Navy team. Each of you pick up a ball. Line up at this goal-line. Joyce, will you take a stop-watch and go over to the other goal-line? Adams, go along and assist Joyce. I want a record of the time it takes each man to cover the distance, running as fast as he can with the ball."

The men designated took their places.

"I'll run you first, Darrin," announced the captain. "Go like a streak, if you can. If you fall down it counts zero. Start when I say 'go.' Are you ready?"

"Quite ready."

"Go!"

At the word Dave sped away like a shot, Hepson giving a hand signal as he uttered the starting word, that the time-keeper at the other end might know when to release the watch. Dave's time was noted. Then Dan took a try, covering the distance in only two fifths of a second more time than Darrin had required. Farley was a second and three fifths behind Darrin's time; Page, a full two seconds behind. White and Bryant then ran, but only succeeded in about tying Page's work.

Then six more men were called to the line and tried out. After that a third squad. By this time Midshipman Hepson had his mind

about made up as to the relative speeds of some of the most likely men for the final Navy team.

"Get out for some kicks, now!" called Hepson.

"When are you going to play football?" growled one man.

Midshipman Hepson turned on him like a flash.

"Jetson, there's a substitute captain in the squad, but you're not the man. Neither are you one of the coaches."

"Oh, you make me——" began Jetson, but Midshipman Hepson cut him short with:

"If you can't keep silence when you've nothing to say, your absence from the field will be considered a favor to the whole squad."

Jetson scowled, but said nothing more. Neither did he offer to retire from the field.

"Jetson has always been a kicker and a trouble mosquito," whispered Dan Dalzell to his chum.

"Oh, in a lot of ways Jetson is a nice fellow," Darrin replied quietly. "The greatest trouble that ails him is that he has just a trifle too large opinion of the importance of his own opinions. There are a lot of us troubled in that way."

The kicking practice was put through with dash and vim. Then Midshipman Hepson, after a brief conference with the head coach, called

off the line-up for the provisional Navy team, following this with a roster of the second team, or "Rustlers," so called because they force the men of the Navy team to rustle to keep their places.

Dave Darrin was called off for left tackle, Dan for left end. Farley and Page held the corresponding positions on the right end of the line-up.

"Begin the game, the Rustlers to have the ball," called Lieutenant-Commander Havens.

"And mix it up lively, Navy," called Hepson, who, both on account of his size and other qualifications, played center.

At the whistle-blast the Rustlers kicked it off—a beautiful, long, arching curve. The ball came to quarter-back, who passed it to Dave Darrin.

Then the fun began.

The Navy line hit the Rustlers hard and tried to bump through. Dan Dalzell devoted every ounce of his strength and every turn of his energy to boosting Darrin through—and Dave himself was not idle. There was an instant of sullen, hard resistance. Then, somehow, Dave was shot through the opposing line. Like a deer he sped, Dan hanging to his flanks. It was up to the Rustlers' halfback now, and that bulky young midshipman leaped to the fray, cleverly barring the way.

At least, the Rustlers' halfback thought he had Darrin blocked. It is never wise to take too much for granted.

As the halfback planted himself for the grapple, Dave suddenly dropped through that opponent's grip and went to the ground.

As though he had been shot through, Dave Darrin went under and past, on one side, between the halfback's legs. He was up again, with Dan at his back. Fullback came at them, but Dan bumped that player aside. Dave dashed on across the line, scoring a touchdown.

Never had the gridiron been the scene of greater excitement than in that rousing moment.

"Darrin! Darrin! Darrin!" came hoarsely from hundreds of throats.

"Dalzell! Dalzell!" came the next gusty roar.

Hepson wiped a moist brow with one hand.

"There are two real players, if they can keep that up," muttered the captain of the eleven.

Jetson had been the tackle opposed to Dave. Just now Jetson was nursing a bump to his vanity.

"How on earth did I ever happen to let Darrin through?" Jetson demanded of himself. "I won't do it again, anyway. If I can only make Darrin look small, I may get his place on the Navy eleven. Darrin is a good fellow, but I've got to make the team, confound him!"

The kick for goal failed. Then the Navy took the ball and promptly enough the Rustlers came back with it, Jetson carrying.

Dave and Dan met the ball-carrier. The Rustlers' support failed, and Jetson went down with the ball. Nor could the second team advance the ball, so it presently came to the Navy men again.

"I want you to put it through again like a cannon-ball, Darrin," Midshipman Hepson whispered as they passed.

So the quarter-backs called for a repetition of the play, giving different signals.

Dave received the ball with a rush of his old-time fervor and confidence. Dan started behind him as full of fire as ever.

In a fraction of a second the impact of the two opposing lines came. Jetson went down, one of his legs flying between Darrin's in such a way as to constitute a foul.

Dave Darrin went down on top of the ball. Half a dozen players sprawled over him. The referee's whistle blew.

"Jetson, that was a mean, deliberate trip," remarked Darrin, as he sprang to his feet. He spoke coolly, with a warning flash in his eyes.

"Not on my part," retorted Jetson.

"You thrust your leg between mine as you went down."

Coach signed to referee not to renew the game for the moment. Then Lieutenant-Commander Havens and the two team captains crowded close.

"I didn't do it deliberately, as you charged," retorted Jetson, hot with anger.

"You deny it?" insisted Dave.

"I do."

"On your word as a gentleman you did not intend a foul trip?" demanded Midshipman Darrin.

"I have already answered you."

"Answer me on your word as a gentleman."

"I don't have to."

"Very good, then," retorted Dave, turning away with a meaning smile.

"Hold on. I pledge you my word as a gentleman that I did not intend to make a foul trip," said Jetson, swiftly realizing the error of his refusal.

In the meantime Lieutenant-Commander Havens had turned to Motley, of the first class, who was serving as referee.

"Mr. Motley," demanded coach, "did you see just what happened?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you call it a foul trip?"

"I do, sir. If I were referee in a regular game, I would penalize the team and order the player from the field."

"Mr. Jetson——" began the coach, but, swift as a flash Dave Darrin interposed, though respectfully, saluting at the same time.

"Will you pardon me, sir. Mr. Jetson has given me his word that he did not intend a foul trip. I accept his word without reservation."

"Very good, then," nodded coach. "But Mr. Jetson, you will do well to be careful in the future, and avoid even the appearance of evil."

"Yes, sir; very good, sir," answered Jetson, looking decidedly sheepish.

In giving his word Jetson had told the truth, or had intended to. The exact truth was that he really did not realize what he had done until it was too late to avoid the foul. He had meant to stop Darrin, somehow.

"Pull that scrimmage off again," directed Coach Havens dryly.

The ball was placed, the whistle sounded, and again Dave received the ball and tried to break through. With the Rustlers prepared for the move, it was blocked and the ball was "down."

Jetson felt his face burning. He knew, well enough, that many of the players regarded him with suspicion.

"I suppose that suspicion will stick, and my chances of making the Navy eleven are now scantier than ever," muttered the unfortunate midshipman to himself.

The whistle blew before any further advantage had been gained. Coach and Midshipman Hepson had gained considerable insight into the work of the team.

"Mr. Hepson," said coach aside, in the interval that followed, "you have done well, I think, to place two such men as Darrin and Dalzell on the provisional team."

"I am glad you think so, sir," replied the Navy football captain, "for that is the way it strikes me."

"If you keep them at the left flank you'll have something like dynamite there," smiled coach. "Mr. Darrin goes through like a cannon-ball, and Dalzell is always just where Darrin needs him."

"These men have played together before, and they're used to team work, sir," said Midshipman Hepson.

"So? Where did they play before coming to Annapolis?"

"On what was, in their day, one of the best High School eleven's going, sir."

"Oho! Do you know, Mr. Hepson, they play more like college men than anything else. It must have been a bully High School team that graduated them."

"From the little that I've heard, sir, that High School team was a great one."

Coach and captain walked back to the scene.

"You will now play another ten-minute period," directed Mr. Havens. "Jetson will withdraw from the second eleven during the next period and Doyle will take his place."

"So that's what coach and team captain were hatching up?" thought Midshipman Jetson. "That gives me a black eye, and my chances of making the Navy eleven are now worse than ever. Probably I won't even make sub."

As Navy and Rustlers again collided in the fray, Jetson watched Dave's work narrowly, furiously.

"Darrin always was a smooth one," Jetson declared angrily to himself. "And now, just because he raised a 'holler,' my football prospects are set back for this year. Probably I can't make the eleven next year, either. And it's all Darrin's fault!"

In forming the second half the coach called:

"Mr. Jetson will resume his place as right tackle on the second eleven."

"Jetson's not here, sir," called a midshipman.

"Where is he?" asked Coach Havens.

"I think he went off the field, sir, to un-tog."

"He should not have left the field without permission," remarked the coach coldly.

Jetson heard of the remark that evening, and his anger against Dave Darrin increased.

CHAPTER VII

"DID JETSON DO IT?"

NO sooner had release from studies sounded through big and handsome Bancroft Hall, than there came a tap at Dave Darrin's door.

"Come in," called Dave.

Hepson came in first, followed by a score of other midshipmen.

"Say, I didn't hear assembly blow lately," remarked Dan Dalzell, closing a new text-book and looking up with a smile of welcome.

"Are we intruding—so many of us," inquired Hepson, halting.

"Not on me, anyway," answered Dave pleasantly. "As for Danny boy, don't mind the little chap. He really believes that study release sounds before supper-call. Come right in, all of you fellows. Dan barks, but won't bite."

"And take seats, all of you, do," urged Dan, with unnecessary hospitality. "After the table and the chairs are used up, we'll provide tacks for the rest."

"Does this little boy ever have a serious streak?" asked one of the callers, regarding Dan with feigned interest.

"Yes; whenever he finds himself marked down to 2.1 in more than three studies," laughed Dave.

"Oh, that's no laughing matter," grimaced another of the visiting midshipmen.

"I don't suppose you can guess what we came to talk about?" went on Midshipman Hepson.

At a wild guess it might be football," hazarded Darrin.

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" gasped another visitor.

"Darry, we've come in to tell you that we believe that you and your erratic roommate are going to save a desperate situation for us," resumed the captain of the Navy team. "Not that we were destitute of good players before. But we lacked enough of different kinds to make a strong, all-around eleven. Now we've a team that we're not afraid, after more work, to put up against anything that the Army can show us."

"Now, I wouldn't be too sure," urged Dave. "Confidence is all right, but don't let it rob us of a jot of practice and work."

"Are you afraid of the Army, Darry?" demanded Hepson.

"I'm not going to be too cock-sure, if the story is true that Prescott and Holmes are out with the Army team this year."

"Are they such great players?" demanded Hepson.

"They are," Dave responded solemnly, "or were. I know something about that pair, since I've played on the same eleven with Prescott and Holmes."

"Are they better than you two, Darry?" Hepson demanded.

"Yes," answered Dave unhesitatingly.

"Is that honesty or extreme modesty?"

"Extreme mod——" broke in Dan Dalzell, but he closed his mouth with a snap and ducked as he saw three of the visitors making for him.

"It's hard to believe," muttered Hepson, though he spoke uneasily. "Why do you rank Prescott and Holmes so high, Darry?"

"Well, for one reason, Dick Prescott taught Dalzell and myself the game. Anything that we know about the game we learned in the team that Prescott captained."

"Still, it's hard to believe," spoke up Midshipman Joyce. "Darrin, we look upon you as the best thing that ever happened to the Navy end of the gridiron."

"I don't know that I care about being 'kidded,'" responded Dave seriously.

"But we honestly do," contended the same speaker, "and we don't like to have you tell us that Prescott is a better man."

"But I believe he is."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"I'm not afraid of any one on the gridiron," Darrin retorted bluntly. "I'll work hard to beat any man that I have to go up against, and if work, this season, will do it, I'll beat Dick Prescott out!"

"Good! That's the way we like to hear you talk," glowed Hepson.

"And I'll bottle up Holmes and put the stopper in," promised Dan with solemn modesty.

Again two of the men made a rush for him to quiet him.

"It may be only a rumor that Prescott and Holmes are on the Army eleven," spoke up another midshipman.

"No," objected still another, "I had a letter, this afternoon, from a cousin who has been up to West Point and has seen the Army crowd at work. The Army is rejoicing over Prescott and Holmes as a pair of precious finds, and they're both nailed to the colors for this season."

"Then we're going to have a tough time in our game with the Army," Darrin declared thoughtfully. "And the Army will beat more college teams this year than usual."

"We won't die until the Army shoots, anyway," promised Hepson. "And now, Darry,

there's another question we want to put to you, and we want an out-and-out answer. Do you believe that Jetson really meant to trip you this afternoon?"

"You heard his denial," Dave rejoined.

"Yes."

"Well, Jetson is a midshipman and a gentleman. There has never been any question here about his honor," Darrin replied. "I accepted his denial of intention at the time, and I still accept it."

"It's queer, then, how Jetson came to give you such a nasty trip," observed another caller.

"I'll tell you what I think really must have happened," Dave continued frankly. "I think Jet was crazy to stop me. It was on his mind, and he was determined to do it. He tripped me, of course, but I think he really acted on an unconscious impulse and without intention. So, at that rate, the trip was not really intended, since he had not deliberately planned it."

"Would you be willing to play on the same team with him, Darry?" pursued Midshipman Hepson.

"Yes, or with any other man in the brigade. I don't suspect any man here at the Naval Academy of anything intentionally and deliberately dishonorable."

"Good, Darry!" cried several midshipmen.

For a few minutes the talk grew fast and furious. Then some one looked at his watch and there was a prompt flight of visitors. Ten minutes later taps sounded and a master switch turned off the lights in midshipmen's quarters, with nearly eight hundred young men in their beds and already dropping asleep.

At eight the next morning the many sections marched off to recitations and for nours the grind of the day was on. At the Naval Academy, as at West Point, not even football is allowed to interfere in the least with studies or recitations. No football player is permitted to go into section room, after extra practice in the field, and announce himself unprepared to recite. Only midshipmen of a good grade of scholarship are permitted to join or remain in the football squad.

Late in the afternoon, when recreation time came, all was speedily changed. Every member of the squad hastily reported in togs. Scores of midshipmen not of the squad hastened over to see the practice work. The scores were presently increased to hundreds. Fifty or more Naval officers detailed at the yard were scattered along the side lines. Many of the wives and daughters of officers stationed at Annapolis turned out to view the work. Other young ladies came from Annapolis. There was also a big

delegation of "St. Johnnies," as the gray-clad young men from St. John's College are called.

The news had evidently traveled far that the Navy had two new men on the team who were expected to prove "wonders."

"A big part of this crowd is out to see you and Danny boy," Hepson remarked to Darrin.

"Haven't they anything better to do with their time, then?" laughed Dave.

"Great Scott, man! Every one of the spectators wants to see the Navy beat the Army this year."

"But these spectators are a heap cheered up by what they've heard about you and Dalzell."

Dave, however, went about his work all but unconsciously. Never much of an egotist, he declined to believe himself the star man of the Navy eleven.

When Coach Havens called off the two teams that were to play that day, Jetson observed that he was not called for either.

"It looks as though Darrin has queered me," muttered that midshipman gloomily to himself. "I didn't think Darrin was quite as bad as that."

After the practice game had started, and Dave had put through the most brilliant play that he had yet exhibited, the air rang with his name from hundreds of throats.

"That's the way!" grumbled Jetson. "It's

all Darrin now! These idiots will forget that I was ever at Annapolis."

Jetson sulked about. After the rebuke he had received the day before from the head coach, he did not dare to carry his sulk so far as to go and un-tog without leave.

Towards the end of the first half of the practice game, a man on the second team was hurt enough to be retired, and Joyce was called.

"They might have given me a chance," quivered Jetson sulkily. "I'm a lot better player than the fool coach imagines. But, anyway, I suppose Darrin has turned the coach and Hepson against me. I owe Darrin for that one!"

Five minutes later another player of the second eleven was retired with an injured wrist.

"Howard!" called the coach briskly.

"Excused for to-day, sir," reported another player.

"Any one but me!" growled Jetson.

"Jetson!" sounded the head coach's heavy voice.

Midshipman Jetson started. His face flushed. Then, for an instant, a sulky impulse seized him to reply that he did not feel up to form to-day. But the midshipman smothered that desire and started forward.

"Here, sir," he reported.

"Take right guard on second," directed Coach Havens.

"Very good, sir."

The game was resumed. Jetson, however, had a face full of sulkiness. As he joined the line-up his eyes rested on Dave Darrin.

"I wonder if Jetson means me any harm?" flashed through Dave's mind. In an instant, however, he dismissed the suspicion.

"Jetson is a midshipman, a gentleman and a man of honor," thought Darrin generously.

The whistle sounded, the ball was snapped back and passed, Darrin received it and dashed forward to carry it past the opponents.

In a twinkling there was a staggering crash. Dave was down with the ball, with men of two teams piled above him.

At the sound of the referee's whistle the mass disentangled itself. Dave and Jetson were at the bottom of the heap. Jetson was the last man up, but Dave still lay there.

"Surgeon here?" called the coach's steady voice, devoid of excitement. But there was anxiety enough when it was seen that Midshipman Darrin still lay face downward.

"Has Darrin been hurt—our Darrin—the great Darrin?" flew from tongue to tongue.

"Did Jetson do it?" was another question that was instantly asked.

CHAPTER VIII

DAN TRIES HARD TO KEEP COOL

A SURGEON and a hospital man were quickly on the spot, the others, anxious as they were, drawing back considerately to give the men of medicine room in which to work.

As Dave Darrin was gently turned over on his back it was seen that Darrin's face was a mass of blood.

"Jetson's work," grunted two or three of the players.

"He did it on purpose!"

"If he didn't, then the fellow is too clumsy to be trusted on the gridiron, anyway."

"We must chase Jetson away from the squad."

"Silence!" remarked Head Coach Havens, very simply, though in a tone which meant that obedience must follow.

Jetson, however, was not ignorant of the comments that were passing. His dark face flushed hotly with anger.

"They'll blame anything on me, if I'm within a mile of the field," he told himself sullenly.

"Is Mr. Darrin badly injured, doctor?" in-

quired Lieutenant-Commander Havens of the Naval surgeon.

"I think not, sir, beyond a possibly nasty mark on the face," replied the surgeon, as he examined and directed the hospital men. "Mr. Darrin is merely stunned, from too hard an impact of some sort. He'll soon have his eyes open—there they come now."

As if to back up the surgeon, Dave opened his eyes, staring curiously at the faces within his range of vision.

"What's all this fuss about?" Dave asked quietly.

"There isn't any fuss, Mr. Darrin," replied the surgeon. "You were stunned by the force of that scrimmage, and there's some blood on your face."

"Let me wipe it off then, please, sir?" Dave begged. "I want to get back in the game."

"You won't play again, Mr. Darrin," replied the surgeon.

"Not play this season?" demanded Dave in anguished amazement. "Please don't joke with me, sir."

"Oh, you'll play, after a few days," replied the surgeon, wetting a piece of gauze from the contents of a bottle that he had taken from his bag. With the gauze he wiped the blood away from Darrin's cheek, revealing a surface cut

of more width than depth. Then a light bandage was put on over the cut.

"Now, I guess you can rise all right, Mr. Darrin. This hospital man will go over to hospital with you."

"I'm not ordered to stay there, I hope, sir?" murmured Dave anxiously.

"For two or three days, at any rate—yes," replied the Naval surgeon. "Not because you're going to be weak, but because we've got to have you under our eyes all the time if your face is to heal without a bad scar."

Midshipman Darrin brought his hand up in salute to the surgeon, and again to Lieutenant-Commander Havens.

"Darrin laid up for a few days!" growled Captain Hepson, of the Navy team, just after Dave had started. "Now, when every day's work counts!" Then wheeling suddenly:

"How did Darrin come to get cut in that fashion, anyway? Mr. Jetson, do you know anything about it?"

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Jetson, bridling. "Do you insinuate that I tried to put a scar on Mr. Darrin's face?"

"I asked you what you knew about the accident—if it were an accident?" Hepson pursued coldly.

"Your 'if,' sir, is insulting!"

Then there came to the spot a presence that could not be treated with anger. Lieutenant-Commander Havens was determined to know the truth.

"Mr. Jetson, had you anything in your possession, or did you wear anything, that could cut Mr. Darrin's face like that?" demanded the head coach.

"Nothing, sir, unless the sole of one of my shoes was responsible," returned Jetson, barely concealing his anger under a mask of respect to an officer of the Navy.

"Let me see your shoes; sit down on the ground first, Mr. Jetson."

The midshipman obeyed, though with no very good grace, and held up his right shoe for the inspection of the head coach.

"Now the other shoe, Mr. Jetson. Hm! Yes; along the inner sole of this shoe there are signs of what looks very much like blood. See here, Mr. Hepson."

"Yes, sir; most certainly this is a streak of blood rubbed into the leather along this rather sharp edge of the sole."

"May I suggest, Mr. Havens," hinted Jetson, "that something else may have scratched Mr. Darrin's face, and that the blood trickled to my shoe? I was under Mr. Darrin, somewhat, sir, in the scrimmage when the bunch went down."

There was really nothing that could be proved, in any case, so the head coach could only say very quietly:

"Let the practice go on, Mr. Hepson. Put Mr. Wardell temporarily in Mr. Darrin's place on the line."

There was one in the group who had not said a word so far. But he had been looking on, his keen eyes studying Jetson's face. That looker-on was Midshipman Dan Dalzell, who, as the reader knows, sometimes displayed a good deal of temper.

"Jetson," muttered Dan, as the other midshipman came over by him, "I shall need a little talk with you at the early convenience of us both."

"Whenever you like," retorted Midshipman Jetson, flashing back a look of defiance.

Then the game went on. By supper time the men of the brigade knew that Darrin was getting along comfortably; that he was in no pain and that he was in hospital only in the hope that he might be saved the annoyance of wearing a disfiguring scar on his face throughout all his life.

"I'm afraid that some of the fellows think I purposely cut Darrin up in that fashion," remarked Jetson to his tablemates during the evening meal.

"Don't you know that you didn't?" inquired one of the midshipmen laconically. None of the other men at table took heed of Jetson's words.

At some of the other tables equal silence did not prevail. Midshipmen who did not accuse or suspect Jetson of intentional wickedness expressed the opinion that he was, at all events, careless and not a valuable member of the football squad.

Jetson himself was wholly aware that he was more or less suspected in the minds of many, and the knowledge made him savage.

During the few minutes recreation that followed the evening meal, Dan Dalzell approached the sullen one, who was now standing quite alone.

"Mr. Jetson, I shall be glad to have a talk with you," announced Dan. "Will you come to my room, or shall I go to yours?"

"Lead the way to your room, sir," replied Jetson stiffly.

Dan did so, and behind the door the two midshipmen faced each other.

"Well, sir?" demanded the visitor.

"Mr. Jetson, both times that you have played against Darrin something has happened to him."

"Don't insinuate, Mr. Dalzell. If you've anything to say, speak out plainly, sir."

"I hardly know what to say," Midshipman Dan confessed. "As a midshipman, your honor should be above question."

"Do you wish to remark that it isn't?"

"Why, I don't know," Dan answered frankly. "It seems a fearful thing to say, or even to think, about a midshipman."

"Mr. Dalzell, either I did, or I didn't, intentionally injure Mr. Darrin. You must think one thing or the other. If you suspect that I did the thing intentionally, then why beat about the bush?"

"I don't want to beat about the bush, and, on the other hand, I don't want to do you any injustice, Mr. Jetson. I thought perhaps you would be willing to help me out by proffering your midshipman's word of honor——"

"And I," rejoined Jetson in cold anger, "consider it insulting, sir, that I should be asked to pledge my word of honor."

"That is an extreme position to take," protested Dan. "No good man, when appearances are against him, should be afraid to offer his word of honor."

"Suppose," sneered Jetson, in suppressed fury, "I should go to the other extreme, and say that I did it on purpose?"

"Then I'd knock you down, like a dog," Dan answered directly and simply, "and next call

on the men here to drive you forth from the brigade."

"If you think you could knock me down," quivered Midshipman Jetson, "you'd better go ahead and find out whether your guess is correct. Dalzell, you've been highly insulting, and I don't mind declaring that a fight with you would suit me, at present, better than anything that I can think of."

"Then you have your recourse, in a challenge," Dan hinted promptly.

"What's the need of a challenge, seconds—or of anything but fists? I don't need them."

"The brigade claims some supervision over fights between the men here," Dan replied. "I intend to demand that the class take up, as a class matter, the mishap to Darrin this afternoon."

"You—you hound!" panted Jetson, in a sudden flare-up of anger.

"Careful!" warned Dalzell, clenching his fists and facing his man squarely.

With a snort of rage Jetson launched himself forward, aiming two blows at Dan.

Dan parried the blows coolly, but his eyes flashed.

He had not lost control of himself, but he was warming up to the instinct of fighting when no other course seemed open.

CHAPTER IX

A NARROW SQUEAK WITH THE O. C.

JETSON'S next blow grazed Midshipman Dalzell's chin. The follow-up blow landed on Dan's left ear.

Now Dalzell "sailed in" in earnest. He attacked forcefully and swiftly. Jetson was forced to give ground. Dan pursued him around the room. Being no coward, Jetson stood well up to the work, driving in for himself at least two out of every five blows that were landed.

Rap-tap-tap! sounded on the door, but neither combatant heard.

Smash! Dan's forceful right landed on Jetson's neck, sending that midshipman to the floor, whereupon Dalzell sprang back three paces.

"Take your time getting on to your feet," called Dan in a low voice.

"I don't want any time," snapped Jetson, leaping to his feet.

The words of both speakers were heard at the door, and the visitor who had knocked now promptly entered.

Fortunate it was for the combatants facing each other that the intruder was not one of the discipline officers. Had it been, both midship-

men would have been reported at once under charges that would have borne serious results.

Instead, it was Farley who entered, followed by Page, Hepson and Joyce.

"Wow!" uttered Midshipman Farley in a low voice. Then: "Stop this, fellows!"

At the order, which Dan knew to be intended for his own good, the latter turned away, letting his hands fall. Jetson, on the point of a rush, realized that he had better desist.

"Joyce, you stand outside," ordered Farley in a low voice. "Stand right at the door. If you see the O. C. (officer in charge) turning into this corridor, you rap as hard as you can on the door, and we'll understand."

Midshipman Joyce wanted most badly to be a spectator to what was likely to happen on the inner side of the door, but he had the good sense to realize that some one must do guard duty, so he stepped outside, closing the door after him.

"Now, gentlemen, what's this all about?" demanded Hepson in a low, smooth voice.

"It means," cried Jetson passionately, "that I'm not going to stand any more of this petty persecution. Everyone has been trying to pretend that he believes I've been trying to do Darrin up so that he can't play on the Navy football team. It's all just a mean scheme to keep me from making the Navy eleven."

"There's no such scheme afloat, or I'd know about it," returned Hepson coolly. "Fact is, there isn't any intention whatever of playing you on the Navy team."

"Ah, you admit it!" snapped Midshipman Jetson, first turning white, after which his face showed a deep crimson of humiliation. "You've already done the dirty work."

"Fellow, stop this talk!" commanded Hepson, almost at a white heat of resentment. "Among midshipmen and gentlemen there can be no thought of what you term 'dirty work.' The fact that you won't play with us is due to your uncontrollable temper. A fellow who can't control his nerves and temper isn't fitted to play football—a game that requires cool judgment at every moment of the game."

"Then, while you're telling me what to stop, you just stop addressing me as 'fellow,'" cried Jetson, his lip quivering with rage.

"I'll admit that was hasty on my part," agreed Midshipman Hepson, "but it seemed necessary to use some word to bring you to your senses. And now, this fight, which would get you both into serious trouble if a discipline officer came upon the scene, must cease."

"I'm afraid it can't," broke in Midshipman Dalzell with quiet dignity. "At least, I won't agree to stopping until Mr. Jetson admits him-

self satisfied. It was he who started the fight, and only his word can close it. But we don't want you other fellows pulled into this trouble as spectators, so we'll wait until you all withdraw."

"If you're determined to fight," rejoined Hepson, who was the only first classman present, "then we don't want to stop the fight. We'll stay and see it pulled off fairly. But, Dalzell, do you really want to fight?"

"I didn't want to," Dan answered. "But, now that Mr. Jetson has started it, it must go on until he's satisfied. Up with your hands, sir, and when you start in, I'll answer you."

The visitors skipped back, in order to leave the combatants plenty of room for footwork. Since Jetson had heard definite announcement of the fact that he could not hope to be called to the Navy eleven, his inward flame of passion had burned up high. He was now ready to fight with all the force that there was in him.

In the first few seconds his assault was so resolute that Dalzell was forced to give ground. As he slowly retreated and shifted, Jetson drove in more impetuously than ever.

Midshipman Dan found himself at last in a position of advantage.

"Now, hammer him, Danny boy!" advised Farley, breathing deeply.

"Silence among the spectators," warned Hepson in a low, stern voice. "Absolutely fair play, gentlemen, to both contestants!"

Again the showering exchange of blows. Jetson, after his late rapid expenditure of force and nerve-energy, was now just the least bit confused. Dan landed on one ear, and then against his enemy's chin. Both were hard, dazing blows, though neither left a mark.

Then an uppercut and Dalzell landed on Jetson's jugular. With a gasp the fellow went down to the floor.

"One, two, three, four——" Hepson began counting.

"Don't bother with the count," begged Dalzell. "I'll give him all the time he wants to get to his feet."

Rap-tap-tap-tap! came a banging summons on the door, folowed by Midshipman Joyce's voice demanding:

"Are you in, Danny boy?"

Swift as a flash Hepson and Farley leaped forward, fairly snatching Jetson, who was still half dazed, to his feet.

In the same instant Page called out cheerily:

"Come in under full steam, whatever craft is outside!"

"Brace up, Jetson! Don't look silly or dazed," warned Hepson, in a stern whisper

"That rap was the signal of the approach of the O. C."

Farley was industriously brushing the signs of dust from Jetson's uniform.

"I tell you, fellows," boomed Hepson's tranquil, earnest voice, "we've got to hustle every minute of practice time. Nothing else will give us a chance to win."

"We haven't even a chance if Darry isn't soon back on the gridiron," argued Farley.

"Oh, he'll be all right soon," broke in Dan Dalzell eagerly.

Joyce had already stepped into the room, leaving the door open. Now, as though by instinct, the midshipmen seemed aware that the O. C., who to-day happened to be Lieutenant Cotton, U. S. N., was standing in front of the doorway gazing in.

Instantly the middies came to the position of attention, looking straight ahead of them.

"Good evening, gentlemen," greeted the O. C. "Is anything unusual going on?"

"We have been discussing the football situation, sir," announced Midshipman Hepson quite truthfully.

Had Hepson been asked if there had recently been a fight in progress he would have answered truthfully, but he did not feel called upon to volunteer damaging information.

"I thought I heard sounds as of some disturbance," remarked the O. C., looking at the young men rather sharply. "That is to say, I was under the impression that there had been some unusual agility in operation. I heard something that sounded like scuffling."

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Hepson; "I think it very likely. The men on this deck, sir, can't think of anything in these days but line-ups and scrimmage tactics."

"It occurred to me," went on the O. C., "that there was some sound of scuffling in this room."

"There was, sir," admitted Midshipman Hepson candidly. "There was a species of scrimmage."

"Was it in connection with football?" inquired Lieutenant Cotton.

"Yes, sir,"—which answer, again, was wholly truthful.

"Ah, I thought I heard something like a scrimmage in the room," assented Lieutenant Cotton. "Yet remember, gentlemen, that quarters is not the place for football practice."

"Very good, sir; thank you, sir," replied the unmovable Hepson.

"And remember that it is now very close to the time for study call," continued the O. C.

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. We are just departing to our various quarters, sir."

"Good evening, gentlemen."

"Good evening, sir."

Lieutenant Cotton passed on down the corridor, and the midshipmen eased themselves from the rigid position of attention.

"That was a narrow squeak," grunted Hepson. "Now, Jetson, get out ahead."

"I'll renew this argument at another time," retorted Jetson slowly, as he crossed the floor.

"You don't need to, sir," Midshipman Hepson advised him. "Every gentleman here will agree with me that Mr. Dalzell had the best of the affair right up to the end. Nor is Mr. Dalzell under any obligation whatever to afford you another meeting on the score of to-night's disagreement."

"We'll see about that," snapped Jetson, as he passed through the doorway.

At that instant the study call sounded. The others hastened away to their quarters.

Dan Dalzell stepped over to the handbowl, washing his hands, after which he went to his study-table and began to arrange his books.

"It's kind of lonely to sit here without old Darry," sighed Dan dismally. "I hope he'll be here with me to-morrow evening. No; I don't either, though. I want him to stay over in hospital until there's no chance whatever that he'll have to wear an ugly scar through life."

It was three evenings later when Midshipman David Darrin returned to his own quarters in Bancroft Hall. By this time the surface wound on his face was healing nicely, and with ordinary care he would soon be without sign of scar.

"Pills (the surgeon) told me that I'll have to be careful and not let anything bump this face for days to come," remarked Dave, pointing to the strip of adhesive plaster that neatly covered his injury.

"Well, you don't need to bump anything," replied Dan quietly. "Hepson wants you on the gridiron the worst way, but he has told me that he won't even allow you to get into togs until Pills has certified that you're fit to play."

"It's tough," sighed Dave, then quietly began his studies.

It is a rare proceeding to send a midshipman to Coventry; a step that is never taken save for the gravest reasons. Dan, having fought, did not feel it necessary to bring Jetson's case before a class meeting, and Jetson escaped Coventry. He was not cut, yet he soon discovered that the average classmate paid no more heed to him than appeared to be necessary for courtesy's sake.

After another week "Pills" consented to Dave Darrin's going out for regular gridiron prac-

tice. Dave needed the work badly, for the Navy team was now on the eve of the first game of the season.

Jetson, with no hope now of making the eleven this year, avoided the field for a few days.

The first game of the season took place on a Saturday afternoon. The opponent was Hanniston College. Ordinarily, in the past, Hanniston had been an easy enough opponent, though there had been years in which Hanniston had carried the score away from the field.

"How many of the regular team do you want to throw into the game against Hanniston, Mr. Hepson?" inquired Lieutenant-Commander Havens the night before the game.

"Every one of them, sir," Hepson answered the head coach. "Until we get into a real game, we can't be sure that we've the strongest eleven. To-morrow's game will show us if we have made any mistakes in our selections."

Even though Hanniston was considered one of the lesser opponents, every man in the brigade speculated with great interest, that night, on the probable outcome of the morrow.

"Darrin will have a good chance to prove himself a dub to-morrow," thought Midshipman Jetson darkly. "I hate to wish against the Navy, but I'll cheer if Darrin, individually, ties himself up in foozle knots!"

CHAPTER X

THE GRIDIRON START

ON the day of the game the midshipmen talked eagerly, and mostly of football, through dinner in the great messhall of the brigade.

"Did any one see the Hanniston infants arrive?" demanded Page.

"Infants, eh?" called Joyce from the next table. "That shows you didn't see the visiting eleven."

"Why? Are they of fair size?" asked Farley.

"It took two 'buses to bring the regular eleven, besides the subs and all the howlers," retorted Joyce. "And the regular eleven, I am reliably informed, tip the scales at four tons."

"Oh, come, now, Joyce, shave off a ton or two," protested Farley.

"I won't take off more than fifty pounds, sir," retorted Joyce with mock stubbornness. "Say! The Hanniston fellows are enormous."

"Then they've run all to bones and haven't any brains," grinned Dan. "After all, we don't mind mere bulk, for intelligence wins most of the games on the gridiron."

"As to their intelligence, I can't say," admit-

ted Joyce. "At any rate, from the glimpse that I got of the Hans, I should say that they average two years older than our men."

"Let's throw up the sponge, then," proposed Dalzell demurely. "If we can't beat the visitors what's the use of playing them? It isn't even necessary to get into togs. We can send a note to the referee, and he can award the game to Hanniston."

"Fine!" broke in Hepson scornfully.

"However, I guess we aren't going to have any cinch to-day," joined in Midshipman Waite, from another table. "I have word from outside, by the way."

"What word?"

"Well, the Hanniston fellows have brought over some money with which to back up the howls they're making for their team. They're offering odds of ten to six that Hanniston wins."

"They stand to lose a lot of money," grinned Hepson.

"But here's the funny part of it," continued Waite. "You know, when the townspeople in Annapolis think they have a really good thing on us, they cover the money of visitors in any wagers on the games."

"Then here's hoping that the Annapolis townspeople win a lot to-day," laughed Midshipman Hepson.

"Yes, but," returned Waite, "what I hear from town is that the Annapolis townspeople have been driven to cover; that they aren't taking up the offers of the visiting Hanniston boys."

"Too bad!" sighed Dave Darrin. "And Annapolis needs the money so badly, too."

"Are we going to win?" asked Waite bluntly.

"Too early to tell you," replied Hepson coolly. "Ask me at supper to-night. But the townies won't wager any money on us this year, eh?"

"The Annapolis people have put up some, but not much," replied Waite.

"We're going to win, just the same," announced Dan Dalzell.

"Sure?" questioned several voices.

"Oh, yes! It's all settled now," laughed Midshipman Waite. "I've been waiting for Danny boy to tell us. Now, we know—we've heard from the hot-air meter."

There was a laugh in which Dan didn't join readily, though his face reddened considerably. Midshipman Dalzell was one of those who always believed that the Navy must win, just because it was the Navy. Some of the other midshipmen didn't go quite as far as that in their confidence.

"Better not call Danny boy names," advised

Dave Darrin gravely. "He might be sulking at just the time when we need him this afternoon."

"That would be unmilitary," retorted Mr. Waite.

"Oh, no," said Dave lightly. "Even as good a soldier as Achilles sulked in his tent, you know."

"Achilles? What class was he in, then?" demanded Waite. "I don't remember the name."

"He was in a class of his own, at the siege of Troy," volunteered Farley.

"Troy, N. Y.?" inquired Waite.

"If you keep on, Waite," muttered Farley, "someone will have to give you an ancient history book at Christmas. You don't seem well posted on Greek tales."

"Don't have to be, thank goodness," returned Waite, helping himself to another piece of beef. "Greek isn't on the list here."

There was abundant time for rest before the game. The players and subs. for the Navy team, however, were early at dressing quarters. Jetson hadn't been called as one of the subs., so he walked sulkily and alone through the grounds while most of the midshipmen strolled about in groups.

Half an hour before the time for the game the spectators' seats held fair-sized crowds. At

that time the Naval Academy Band began to play, just to keep the waiting ones more patient.

Ten minutes later the Hanniston players came on to the field at a slow trot. Instantly the Hanniston howlers in the audience began to whoop up the noise. The midshipmen joined in cheers, and then the band took up the music again.

At first sight of the visitors, some of the Navy people began to have their doubts about victory. The Hannistons surely were "bulky." In size and age, the visitors were as formidable as any of the college elevens.

Many of the midshipmen, too, recalled what they had heard Waite say at table. It seemed little wonder that the popular odds were against the middies.

But the band, having played its welcome to the Hannistons, who were now chasing a ball over the field in practice, almost immediately switched off into the strains of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

All doubts were dispelled for the moment at least, as all the Navy people present let loose a tremendous cheer in which the midshipmen spectators led, for now Captain Hepson was leading his own men on to the field, the hope of the Navy that day.

"Hepson! Hepson!" went up rousingly from the brigade.

"Darrin! Darrin!" howled others.

"Dalzell!"

"Darrin! Darrin!"

"Hepson must enjoy hearing more noise for Darrin than for himself," reflected Jetson moodily.

But Hepson, big in body, heart and mind, was intent only on victory. It did not even occur to the captain of the Navy eleven that Darrin was getting more of a reception than himself. Hepson was simply and heartily glad to find himself supported by two such promising grid-iron men as Darrin and Dalzell.

"Remember, Darry, how much we're backing on you to-day," muttered Hepson, after another round of yells for Dave had been given.

"I can't do everything, and perhaps not much," smiled Dave. "But I'll do my level best to do all that you call upon me for at my own little spot in the line."

A din of Hanniston yells was now smiting the air. Uncle Sam's midshipmen waited with patience and courtesy, but when their turn came they volleyed forth four times as much as the visiting howlers could supply.

"I hope Darry is in great form to-day," murmured the midshipman seated next to Jetson.

"He looks to be in as good shape as ever, doesn't he?" asked Jetson sullenly.

"Oh, I forgot," exclaimed the other. "You don't like Darry any too well."

"I've nothing against him that would make me want to see him in bad form," grumbled Jetson. "I'm a Navy man and I don't want to see any but Navy victories."

The toss had just been made, the visitors winning the kick-off. At a sign from a Navy officer in the field the leader silenced his band and a hush fell over the gridiron and the seats of the onlookers.

CHAPTER XI

THE BAND COULDN'T MAKE ITSELF HEARD

WITHIN five minutes the Hanniston players had established the fact that they were not only bulky, but quick and brainy. In fact, though the Navy promptly blocked the ball and got it, the middies were unable to make headway against the college men. Then Hanniston took the ball, fighting slowly but steadily toward the Navy goal line.

"I don't see Darrin making any wonderful plays," thought Jetson to himself. He was gloomy over seeing the Navy outplayed, but secretly glad that the spectators had as yet found no occasion to shout themselves hoarse over Midshipman Dave's work.

Outside of the brigade the other spectators in the Navy seats felt themselves under a cloud of increasing gloom.

"From all the talk I had expected more of Mr. Darrin," remarked an officer's wife to her husband.

"Darrin has a fearful Hanniston line against him," replied the officer. "Captain Hepson realizes that, too, and he isn't pushing Darrin as hard as you might wish to see."

"We're going to be beaten, aren't we?" asked another Navy onlooker.

It was as yet too early to predict safely, though all the appearances were that the visitors would do whatever scoring was to be done to-day.

Yet, even when they felt themselves outclassed, the middies hung to their opponents with dogged perseverance. It took nearly all of the first half for the Hannistons to place the Navy goal in final, desperate danger.

Then, of a sudden, while the Hannistons worked within a dozen yards of the Navy goal line, the college boys made a new attack, the strongest they had yet shown.

There was a bumping crash as the lines came together, at the Navy's right. Farley and Page were swept clear off their feet and the assailants swept onward. Another clever attack, backed by a ruse, and one of the college boys started on a dead run with the ball. In vain the Navy's backs tried to stop him. The Hanniston boys successfully interfered for their runner, and the ball was touched down behind the goal line.

Gone were the cheers that had been ascending from the brigade. All the Navy crowd gasped in dismay. The ball was carried back, kicked, and Hanniston had scored six points.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha—Hanniston!

Wow!" went up derisively from the visiting howlers.

"Hepson! Hepson! Pull us out!" came the appeal.

"Darry! Darry! Rush it!"

As the two elevens were lining up for another start the time-keeper's whistle sounded the end of the first half of the game.

Gloomy, indeed, were those who had hoped to see the Navy win. There were no cheers, save from the visitor-howlers. The best that the leader of the band could do, was to swing his baton and start in the strains of " 'Twas Never Thus in Olden Times."

"What do you make of the enemy, Hepson?" inquired Joyce, as the middies rested at the side lines.

"We haven't made anything of them yet, but we've got to make wrecks of 'em before the last half is over," grunted the captain of the Navy.

"How are we going to do it?" asked another player.

"By just hanging at them with sheer grit," replied the captain gravely. "Fellows, they've beaten us so far, but they haven't worn us out any. Big fellows as the Hannistons are, they may not have the endurance to hang to us through all of the coming half."

"That makes me remember a song I heard

when on leave this year," grinned Page. "A part of it runs:

"'Said the ant to the elephant,
"Who are ye shoving?
There's one wide river to cross!"'"

"And we're the elephants?" inquired Farley in mock innocence.

"Do we look it?" demanded Page in disgust.

"Remember, fellows," warned Hepson, as the signal summoned both teams back to the field, "many a hopeless game has been won in the last five minutes. But don't wait. Hammer the college boys from the start!"

"Dalzell and I can stand hard work and pounding whenever you get ready to put it on us," Dave announced to Hepson. "Don't try to spare us any. Both of us would sooner be carried away on stretchers than see the Navy lose its first game to a minor college."

The game was resumed. For ten minutes the Navy played mainly on the defensive. Indeed, to the spectators it seemed all that the middies could do against such big fellows as the visitors.

Just after that, however, Hepson passed the silent signal, and then the midshipmen hurled themselves into the fray to test out all the endurance that the Hanniston players might possess.

Many a college boy on the opposing line wondered where these smaller men in the Navy togs had obtained all the fight that they now showed. The big fellows didn't seem able to stand it long. The Navy had the ball, and now slowly fought down toward the college goal. Onlookers in the Navy seats began to stand up, to watch breathlessly, and be ever ready to cheer.

"Hurl little Darry in!" yelled someone hoarsely in a momentary lull in the noise.

But Hepson, watching every chance with tiger-ish eyes, was yet cool-headed, as a football general should be. Twice he used Darrin to advance the ball, and each time Dave gained a few yards. The third time, wearied by pounding his head against a human stone wall, Dave failed to gain more than half a yard. Watchful Hepson sent the ball, after the next snap-back, over to the Navy's right.

The time of the second half was slipping away, and it now looked as though the middies might gradually have won by the steady, bull-dog quality of their tactics.

Nearer and nearer to the college goal line the team of smaller men fought the pigskin, until at last they had it within six yards of the Hanniston fortress. But at this point the visitors stayed further progress long enough to have the pigskin ovoid come to them by a block.

The situation was desperate. Hanniston could not get the ball away from its present locality, and in dread the college captain sent the ball back of his own line to a safety.

This counted two for Annapolis, but it also set the ball back twenty-five yards from the college line.

"Block! block! block—if you can't fight the ball back to the Navy goal," was the word that Captain Hart, of the college team, sent along his own line. "Don't be too reckless. Just fight to keep the Navy from scoring."

"Hepson! Hepson!" came, appealingly, from the seats, as the two elevens lined up at the twenty-five-yard line.

"Darry! O Darry!"

Grim determination written on their faces, eleven middies awaited the signal, then hurled themselves forward like tigers.

The ball came to Dave, who started with it. Dan Dalzell, watching his chum with cat-like eyes, followed and made the best interference that he had offered that day.

Five and a half yards won!

As center bent for the snap back, a "fake" signal was called by the Navy quarter-back.

Just as the ball started, the Navy players back of the line started toward the right. The Hanniston men, tired now, but full of grit as

ever, moved to block. The Navy gained a second or two, for the pass was really to the left, and again Darrin had the pigskin clutched tightly as he started to run and deceive. Again Dan and the others of the interference sustained their idol and champion. Dave went soon to earth, but he had forced the ball another six yards!

"Darry—oh, Darry!"

"One more play and over the line!"

"You've got the elephants going at last."

"Rush 'em!"

"A touchdown saves us!"

Dan's face was flushed, Dave's white and set as the line again formed for the next play.

Quarter-back Joyce held up his head, watching the field like a mouse seeking escape.

Then came the emergency signal:

"Nine—fourteen—twenty-two—three!"

Back came the pigskin while the middies seemed to throw their bodies toward the right. It looked as though they were trying to mask this feint.

The ball was in motion. But Dave had it, instead of Farley. Instantly the Navy swung its entire line toward the left, for this was the grand rush, the die on which everything was cast!

Dave was darting forward, and never had his interference backed him better.

Before Midshipman Darrin stood one of the big college men, who looked fully equal to stopping the midshipman anywhere and at any time.

Nor did Darrin try to dodge this bulky player. Instead, Dave, as he hurled himself at the opponent, sprang high into the air, as though he had some desperate plan of leaping over the barrier.

Braced on his legs, his two feet solidly planted, this Hanniston man felt ready for any shock that Dave Darrin could bring against him.

But Darrin did not touch him. On the contrary, the Navy's hope fell to the ground, just short of the blocking opponent.

Like a flash Dave went between that pair of solidly braced, wide-spread legs. In a wriggle that looked flash-like to the breathless beholders, Darrin was through. He had taken desperate chances, when he went down, of being beset, and forced to hold the pigskin where he had fallen.

But now Dave was up and running, and the player who had sought to block him was far in the rear.

The whole Navy force hurled itself around this point, battering down the startled opposition. With fast-coming breath Dave's comrades pushed him along breaking down all opposition

—until Dave, with a sudden, wild dash, was over the line for a touchdown.

"Darry did it! Darry did it!"

For fifteen seconds the uproar was deafening. The college players looked stunned, while their howlers, over on the visitors' seats, seemed to shrink within their coats.

"Seven to six!"

"Make it eight!"

Dave Darrin had borne the brunt of battle. Now his eyes were flashing with excitement.

"I'd like you to try the kick for goal, Darry, but I don't know," called Hepson in his ear. "You may be about used up."

"Let me have the kick. I'm not afraid," Dave half boasted, for now he could think of nothing but victory.

"All right. Take it," agreed Hepson.

Dave Darrin did take the kick. Never had he made a better one. The ball went straight and true between the goal-posts.

The band-leader held his baton poised, but the Navy spectators broke into such a riot of joy that he let the baton fall inertly.

"What's the use?" he asked the musicians.

Again the players lined up, with the Navy score eight to six.

Ten seconds later, the whistle blew, announcing the end of the game.

CHAPTER XII

JOYCE IS BITTEN BY THE TROUBLE BUG

THE game was over. The giant visitors had departed, and the Naval Academy atmosphere appeared to be rarefied.

Most of the members of the brigade were back in Bancroft Hall, and this being late Saturday afternoon, study was over save for those who felt the need of devoting extra time to their books.

Farley, Page and Joyce had dropped into the room occupied by Dave and Dan.

"Hepson was nearly crazy this afternoon," remarked Joyce, laughing.

"Then he had an easy way of concealing the fact," Dave replied. "I call him a cool football captain, with plenty of judgment and patience."

"Yes; but I happen to know that he was badly upset," returned Joyce. "Twice he sent me the wrong signal about the numbers to call, and he admitted it afterward. He was afraid, before the game was twenty minutes' old, that we were up against a big walloping."

"Oh, well," Darrin replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, "the Navy is just as used as the Army is to being walloped in athletics. The

trouble with the Army and Navy teams, in athletics, is that we're always pitted against college men who are bigger and older than we are. It's just about as unfair to us, as it would be unfair to High School teams if we played against High Schools instead of colleges. We could wallop High School outfits at either baseball or football, and the only wonder is that the Army and Navy win as many games as they do against the colleges. College teams have more time for training than the Army or Navy teams do."

"What are you going to do to-night, Darry?" Joyce asked presently. "The hop?"

"No," Dave answered almost shortly. The truth was that he was no "hop-fiend" or "fusser." Except when Belle Meade was at Annapolis to go to a hop with him, Darrin had little liking for the ball.

"I don't intend to hop either," Joyce continued. "Now, are you well enough up in grease to get town leave for the evening?"

"Grease" means good standing on the conduct report.

"Yes," nodded Dave. "Danny and I could easily get town leave, if we had a good excuse. But, of course, it's out of the question to get leave merely to roam the streets. We'd have to explain where we were going, and then go there."

"There's a show on at the theatre," broke in Dalzell.

"Yes," nodded Dave. "But do you know what kind of show it is?"

"No."

"It's a burlesque show, brought here to win away the half dollars of the sailors on the ships here. We'd stand very little chance of getting leave to go to that kind of show."

"But I want to go somewhere, away from the Academy grounds, just for a couple of hours," sighed Joyce.

"I'd like to go also," agreed Dave. "But where could we go? That is, to what place or for what purpose could we go that would be approved by the O. C.?"

This proved to be a poser indeed.

"Fact is," Joyce went on, "I'm so desperate for a little change that I don't believe I'd funk at taking French over the Academy wall. What do you two say?"

"That dog won't bark," Dave retorted.

"Oh, you greaser!" Joyce shied at him.

"Well, I am greasing to the extent that I won't imperil my chances of keeping in the service by taking any French leave," Darrin replied steadily. "So, Joyce, I'm afraid a trip to town to-night is out of the question, unless you can think up some plan to get by the O. C."

"How are you on Frenching the wall, Danny boy?" queried Joyce.

"Just about as big a muff as Darry," Dan returned dryly.

Joyce remained for some moments in deep meditation. He wanted to go into Annapolis, and he didn't care about going on a lonesome expedition. The more he thought the better Joyce realized how hard it was to frame a request that would get past the O. C.

"I have it," spoke up Dalzell at last. "We'll ask leave to run up to Baltimore to consult an oculist."

"You idiot!" cried Joyce impatiently. "None of us need spectacles."

"Besides, there's no train running to Baltimore as late as this," added Dave.

"No good, then," sighed Dalzell, "and my inventiveness is gone."

"I'm afraid we'll have to French it over the wall," insisted Joyce.

"You'll French it alone, then," Dave declared. "I draw the line at leaving the grounds without official permission."

"Prig!" grunted Joyce under his breath. Then he started up, his eyes shining with the light of a new resolve.

"Got an idea?" asked Dan.

"Yes," said Joyce. "And you'll call me a

fool if I let you in on it now. Wait until I see how it works."

With that he hastened from the room. Darrin drew down a book from the bookshelf, and from between its pages extracted a letter from Belle, which he began to read for the dozenth time.

A few minutes passed. Then Joyce knocked, next entered the room with jubilation apparent in his face.

"I've fixed it," he cried. "All you fellows have to do is to go to the O. C. and make your request in person."

"Request for what?" Dave asked, looking up as he folded the letter.

"I told the O. C., plumply, that we were so tired of being on this side of the wall that we felt desperate for a change. I reminded him that we are all three in the top grease grade, and told him that we wanted permission to take a short stroll through Annapolis to-night. O. C. hemmed and hawed, and said it was a most unusual request for the evening, though proper enough for Saturday afternoon. At last he called up the commandant of midshipmen, stated the case and asked if he might grant the permission. The com. was game and said all right. So all that remains is for you two to go to the O. C. and make your request in person.

Scat! Get in motion! Start! I'll wait here until I hear that you've put it through."

"Of course, Joyce, you're not putting up a joke on us?" demanded Darrin, looking keenly at the Navy quarter-back.

"On my word I'm not."

"Come on, Danny boy," called Dave, starting, and Dalzell followed readily enough. They entered the office of the O. C., saluted and stated their case.

"It is, of course, a somewhat unusual request to grant for the evening," replied Lieutenant-Commander Denham. "However, I can grant it if you will both assure me that you will take extreme pains to keep out of trouble of any kind, and that you will not enter the theatre or any other resort that would be bad judgment for a midshipman to enter."

"As to that, sir," Darrin replied, "I long ago resolved not to take any chances whatever of breaking any disciplinary requirements that would bring me demerits. I am working hard to get through the academic requirements, sir, and I don't intend to pass the mental ordeals here and then find that I can't keep on as a midshipman just because I have too many demerits against me. I think, sir, you may feel assured I shall not allow myself to do anything that would bring me under discipline."

"Your resolution was and is a most excellent one, Mr. Darrin," replied the O. C. "Mr. Dalzell, do you share Mr. Darrin's determination as to keeping out of trouble in Annapolis this evening?"

"Emphatically, sir."

"Then the desired permission is granted. You will enter proper report as to the time of leaving and returning."

Thanking the O. C. and saluting, Dave and Dan hastened back to Joyce.

"Not so difficult, was it?" demanded the Navy quarter-back.

"It was a whole lot better than planning to French the trip," retorted Darrin. "Now, we shall leave here to-night feeling perfectly safe as to our place on the pap."

"Pap" is the sheet on which the day's report of midshipmen conduct is kept.

"I'll admit that caution is sometimes worth while," laughed Joyce.

Soon after the call for supper formation sounded. The meal hour was a merry one that evening. The afternoon's game was naturally the main subject for conversation.

Dave naturally came in for much praise for the way he had saved the Navy game, but this flattery bored him. Darrin did not in the least imagine that he was a wonder on the gridiron.

In fact, the game being past and won, he did not take any further interest in it. Such thought as he now gave to football concerned the games still to come.

Immediately after the meal the three midshipmen reported their departure into Annapolis. Then they went to the main gate, passed through and strolled on up Maryland Avenue into State Circle.

"I'm sorry we promised not to go to the theatre," murmured Midshipman Joyce.

"I'm not," retorted Dave. "Without that promise we wouldn't have secured the leave."

"But what are we going to do," demanded the dissatisfied one, "now that we are outside the grounds?"

"We can't do much, except what we came out to do," Dave reminded Joyce. "We can just walk about and stretch our legs, look in at a few store windows and make a few trifling purchases that won't exhaust our small store of pocket money."

"Exciting prospect!" remarked Joyce.

"Well, what ails you?" demanded Dalzell with unusual quietness. "What do you want to do? Something that will get us into big trouble with the O. C. and the com.?"

"Joyce can't tell you what he longs for, for he doesn't know himself," explained Dave.

"But I know. He wants to do something irregular; anything that is slightly in breach of the regulations—something that will get him hauled up before the O. C. and the pap."

"You're a wonderful guesser," laughed Joyce. "Well, I'll admit that I'm simply restless, and that anything that will stir my blood and my liver will fill the bill. I'm afraid I'm so depraved to-night that even a street-fight wouldn't go against the grain."

"You'd better forget it," advised Darrin quietly. "It's a dangerous frame of mind for a future officer and gentleman, who must acquire control over himself before he can be fit to command men."

"You talk like a padre!" (chaplain) uttered Joyce in disgust. "Can't you forget, for one evening, that you're a midshipman?"

"No; I don't want to," Dave returned quietly.

"Prig!" uttered Joyce again, and this time he did not take the pains to speak under his breath. But Darrin only smiled indulgently.

By way of simple dissipation the three midshipmen went to a drug store, enjoying themselves with ice cream sodas. Soon after they found themselves in a Main Street bookstore, looking over post cards. They could, however, find no new ones, and so left without buying.

"And there's the theatre right over there!" sighed Joyce.

"It would be against our word as midshipmen and gentlemen to visit it," Dave urged. "Come on, Joyce; we'll turn into one of the very quiet side streets and stroll along. Then we'll be out of temptation."

Accordingly they went to one of the all but deserted side streets of the better sort.

"There's a comrade ahead of us," said Dave in an undertone presently, as he made out the uniform half a block away.

Hardly had he spoken when a door opened and a young man in evening clothes came lightly down the steps. At once the unknown midshipman wheeled and sprang at the young civilian. There was a swift interchange of blows, over almost as soon as it started, for the unknown midshipman speedily knocked down the man he had assaulted. Nor did the civilian get up at once. Instead, he bawled lustily for help.

Joyce made a move to spring forward, but Dave caught him by the arm.

"Don't get forward, Joyce. If you do, you'll probably recognize the midshipman. Then you'll have to report his name."

Answering the calls for help five other young men ran out of the same house. The midshipman disdained to flee and stood his ground.

"We'll teach you!" snarled one of the newly arrived civilians, raising his cane as though to bring it down on the midshipman's shoulders.

The midshipman, like a flash, wrenched the cane from the other's hands and began to lay it lustily about him. The whole crowd, therefore, including the young man who had first been knocked down, joined in the attack.

"That's too much like cowardice, and we're bound to go to the rescue of a comrade!" muttered Dave Darrin, his eyes blazing. "Come on, fellows—and be sure not to recognize that comrade!"

In a moment the fight was somewhat more equal. Darrin, Dalzell and Joyce were all accomplished and disciplined boxers. They closed with the crowd around the midshipman.

Crack! thump! bump! Midshipman blows landed heavily and rapidly. The civilians were soon worsted and scattered.

"Whoever you are, comrade," muttered Dave in a low tone, wheeling the unknown midshipman around, "don't look our way and don't give us any chance to recognize you. Scoot!"

"Po-o-o-lice!" lustily yelled one of the crowd of defeated civilians.

CHAPTER XIII

HEPSON IS "SOME WILD"

"POLICE!" bawled others of the civilians, taking up the hue and cry.

That spelled serious trouble if Dave and his friends should tarry there. Midshipmen are in no sense free from arrest by the civil authorities, and it is likely to fare hard with Uncle Sam's young sailors if they are taken in by the civil authorities.

"Come along," muttered Darrin, leading the way. He did not run, but he certainly walked fast, and in a direction away from Main Street. His two companions followed him. The unknown midshipman, taking Darrin's shrewd hint, had already made himself invisible.

After the prompt drubbing they had received, not one of the young civilians felt any desire to follow these husky midshipmen.

The police in Annapolis are few in number, and so do not always hear a street summons. In this instance Dave and his friends turned a corner and were soon away from the scene of the late affair.

"Now, I hope you've had all the excitement you want, Joyce," Dave remarked dryly.

"Like most good things, it didn't last long," complained Joyce.

"Oh, it isn't over yet, by any means. We've the O. C. and the com. to face," grumbled Darrin. "But we couldn't stand by and see one of our own punched by a whole gang."

"Of course we couldn't, but why fuss about the com, and his satellite, the O. C.? They'll never hear of this."

"I think there's a big chance that we shall hear of it," retorted Dave. "That's why I advised you not to look at the unknown midshipman closely enough to be able to recognize him in the dark."

"I don't know who he was," admitted Dan candidly.

"Nor do I," supplemented Joyce.

"Then, whoever he is, the chap stands little chance of being caught unless he voluntarily announces himself."

Presumably the police didn't answer the hail of the young civilians. At any rate, Darrin and his friends heard nothing more of the matter while in town.

But when they returned to Bancroft Hall the trio were met by this announcement:

"The officer in charge wishes to see you in his office."

"It's coming," warned Dave, as he and his

companions turned and went in to report themselves.

"There has been a disturbance in Annapolis," stated Lieutenant-Commander Denham. "Mr. Darrin, were you in it?"

"I was in one kind of disturbance, sir," Darrin answered at once.

"Of what kind?"

"Several civilians attacked a man in a midshipman's uniform. I went to his aid."

"And attacked some civilians?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Dalzell, Mr. Joyce, did you also take part in that affair?" inquired the O. C.

"Yes, sir," answered both midshipmen.

"For what reason?"

"Because, sir," answered Joyce, "several civilians pounced upon one man who wore a midshipman's uniform."

"And you three rushed in and pounded some civilians?" asked the O. C. coolly.

"I'm afraid we did, sir," answered Dave, who found the lieutenant-commander's gaze turned on him.

"Who was that other midshipman, Mr. Darrin?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Didn't you recognize him when you went to his aid?"

"I did not, sir."

"Did either of you gentlemen recognize the midshipman to whose rescue you rushed?"

Dan and Joyce replied in the negative.

"Tell me the circumstances of the attack, Mr. Darrin. Take pains to make your statement so exact that you will not have to amend the statement afterwards."

Darrin told the affair as it had happened.

"Hm! And none of you recognized the fourth midshipman?" pursued the O. C. "That, in itself, was strange. Mr. Darrin, was there any agreement among you three that you would not recognize your comrade?"

"Not exactly an agreement, sir," Dave confessed candidly. "At the distance that we were from the scene before we rushed in the darkness prevented our seeing the face of the unknown midshipman. As we started forward, I will admit that I warned Mr. Dalzell and Mr. Joyce not to look at the other midshipman's face."

"So that you might answer truthfully, if asked, that you did not know the man?"

"Yes, sir; that was my reason for so advising Mr. Dalzell and Mr. Joyce."

"That was what might be termed extraordinary foresight, Mr. Darrin," remarked Lieutenant-Commander Denham ironically.

"Thank you, sir," answered Dave as innocently as though he did not understand that he had just been rebuked. The O. C. frowned.

"Mr. Darrin, since I assume you to have been the ringleader of your trio, did you give that wonderful advice to your companions just so that you might be able to refuse any aid to the Naval Academy authorities in running this matter to the ground?"

"Yes, sir," Dave answered very frankly.

"You wished, then," demanded the O. C. sternly, "to hinder the course of justice at the Naval Academy?"

"It, at least, sir, did not strike me at the time quite in that light."

"Yet something was happening on the streets of Annapolis that you knew would be very thoroughly investigated if it were reported here, and so you took precautions against being able to aid the authorities in the investigation?"

"I admit the truth of that, sir."

"Mr. Darrin, why did you feel called upon to try to defeat the investigation that you foresaw, and which is now under way?"

"Because, sir, it is contrary to the spirit of the brigade of midshipmen to carry tales against each other. I did not care to act contrary to that spirit."

"Perhaps it would be more accurate to say

that you did not dare," observed the O. C. half sneeringly.

"That way of stating it would be true, sir. I do not care to turn informer against my comrades."

"Yet you think you possess the courage to become one of our fighting officers in the future, if the need arises?

"Of my courage as a fighting man, sir, I am unable to form any opinion until that courage has been properly tested."

"But you are afraid to inform the authorities of the identity of comrades who commit serious offenses?"

"As it is contrary to the spirit of the brigade, sir, I would be more afraid of my own contempt than of any other punishment."

Lieutenant-Commander Denham appeared to lose some of his patience presently.

"I wonder," he remarked brusquely, "why you midshipmen cannot learn to accept some of your sense of honor from the officers who have seen so much more service than you. I wonder why you will go on formulating your own canons of honor, even when such beliefs sometimes result in the dismissal of midshipmen from the service."

The three midshipmen, not being questioned, remained silent.

"And so not one of you has the slightest idea of the original nature of the quarrel in which you so readily took part? And none of you has any idea of the identity of the fourth midshipman concerned in this evening's work?"

"I have not, sir," replied Midshipmen Darrin, Dalzell and Joyce in one breath.

"Very good, gentlemen. The matter will be investigated further. You will go to your quarters and remain there. You will take part in the meal formations, but in no drills or recitations until you are further advised. And you will not leave Bancroft Hall without direct orders from competent authority."

The three midshipmen saluted, turned and left the office, going to their own rooms.

"Wow!" muttered Dan as soon as the chums had closed their door on themselves.

"We shall surely have enough to think of," smiled Dave wearily.

"Oh, aye!" agreed Dalzell.

"Oh, well, if we're going to skip some recitations we'll need all the more study," sighed Dave, seating himself at his study table and drawing his books toward him.

But he was not permitted to study long in peace. Word of the affair had spread, and Hepson presented himself at Darrin's quarters in great consternation.

"Great!" mocked Hepson. "Just when we've discovered that the Navy has a dub team without you two, or next door to one, then you two go and get ordered to quarters. You'll not turn out with us Monday; you may not practice with us through the week or play in our next game. Fine!"

"Perhaps," grinned Dan, "if we two are so important to Navy prestige as you appear to imagine, we shall not be kept long from the gridiron."

"Dalzell," retorted Hepson impatiently, "you're a second classman, and you've been here long enough to know that no considerations of discipline will be made to stand aside in order that the Navy may have a better athletic team of any kind. Nothing here is sacrificed to athletics, and you surely must know it."

"Then I guess we're dished," confessed Dalzell mournfully.

"A fine way for you two to go and use the football squad! Great!" insisted Hepson bitterly.

"Had you been with us, Hepson, you'd have done just as we did. I know that," Dave replied.

"Well, you are calling me a bit," agreed Hepson. "After all, I don't know just what it was

that got you both into this scrape. Some kind of fight, or other row, in town, was all I heard."

"Then I'll tell you about it," Darrin went on quietly.

"Well, I really don't see how you could have helped it," agreed Midshsipman Hepson after he had listened. "But that doesn't save us any. We're out our two best line players and our quarter-back."

"Oh, we'll be restored to the squad as soon as the sentence has been pronounced," predicted Dan Dalzell.

"Even if you're bounced out of the Naval Acadmy?" demanded Hepson savagely.

"It—it won't be as bad as that," faltered Dan.

"Perhaps not," agreed Hepson, "though you must understand that the charge of assaulting civilians is not a light matter. You can be dismissed for it, you know."

"Yes," nodded Dave Darrin, and then Danny boy went several shades less ruddy.

"Here's hoping for the best," grumbled Hepson, holding out his hand to each in turn. "And, for the love of Mike, keep out of all further trouble! Don't look cross-eyed—once—until after November!"

CHAPTER XIV

TWO SIDES OF A STORY

ONE circumstance puzzled all of the midshipmen who first heard of the affair. The fourth, and unknown, midshipman, who had waited outside of the house and assaulted the first civilian, must have known the latter or it was not likely that he would have committed the assault. That being the case, it was just likely that the civilian knew and had recognized the unknown midshipman who had knocked him down. Such an attack must have followed some prior dispute.

Then, since the civilians had undoubtedly made complaint to the Naval Academy authorities, how had they been able to get out of supplying the name of the midshipman unknown to Dave and his friends?

Right after breakfast the next morning Dave Darrin and his friends of the evening before were summoned before the commandant of midshipmen. By that officer they were questioned very rigidly, but they had nothing to add to their statement of the night before. They were therefore ordered back to their quarters, with permission only to attend chapel that forenoon.

Just after chapel, however, the fourth midshipman discovered himself to the officer in charge. He was Midshipman Totten, of the fourth class.

Totten admitted that it was he who had waited outside of the house in question, and who had knocked down the civilian. He further gave the name of that civilian, who was the son of one of the prominent officials of the state government.

"Why did you strike him, Mr. Totten?" demanded the officer in charge.

"Because, sir, the fellow had grossly insulted a young lady whom I felt bound to avenge."

"Who is the young lady?"

"Am I obliged, sir, to give her name in the matter?"

"It will be better, Mr. Totten. You may be sure that your statement will be treated with all the consideration and confidence possible."

Totten thereupon explained that the young woman in question was his cousin. Totten, who was an orphan, had been brought up by an aunt who had but one child of her own, the young woman in question. When Totten had won an appointment to the Naval Academy, the aunt and cousin had decided to move to Annapolis sooner than have their little family broken up.

"How did you come to be outside the Academy grounds last evening, Mr. Totten? You were not on leave to go outside."

"I took the chances and Frenched it, sir," confessed Totten candidly. "I knew that I could not get leave, and so did not ask it. But I felt that the fellow had to be punished, no matter at what hazard to myself."

"Then you considered the avenging of the insult to your cousin as being a matter of greater importance than your future career in the Navy?"

Midshipman Totten paled, but he answered bravely:

"Yes, sir; and at the same time a Naval career means nearly everything in the world to me."

Lieutenant-Commander Morrill, the new officer in charge, felt that it was difficult to rebuke a future Naval officer for defending from insult a woman dear to him.

"I shall have to pass this matter on to the commandant of midshipmen," decided the O. C. "Mr. Totten, you will go to your quarters and remain there, until further orders, save only for meal formations."

"Very good, sir," replied the fourth classman saluting.

"That is all, Mr. Totten."

"Very good, sir."

Within half an hour, Dave, Dan and Joyce knew that the unknown midshipman had come forward and announced himself, but they did not hear the story of the reasons back of Totten's attack. They heard, however, that Totten had not heard of their predicament until just after chapel call.

The commandant of midshipmen sent for Mr. Totten. That official, however, after hearing the story, felt that the matter was one for the superintendent. The superintendent did not send for Totten and question him, but sent, instead, for the civilians who had lodged the complaint the evening before. He sent also for young Crane, the man Totten had named, and who had not been among the complainants of the evening before.

"Mr. Crane," announced the superintendent, "you know, of course, the name of the midshipman who assaulted and knocked you down before the other three midshipmen interfered in the matter?"

"Er—er—possibly I do," confessed Crane, reddening.

"Mr. Crane, if you wish us to deal frankly with you, you must accord the same treatment to the officials of the Naval Academy," replied the superintendent coldly.

"I—I—personally do not desire to press any complaint," continued young Crane. "I am sorry that my friends took such a step."

"Then you consider, Mr. Crane," pressed the superintendent, "that the knock-down blow you received from a midshipman was in the nature of a merited punishment?"

"I—I won't say that," cried Crane quickly. "No, sir! I won't admit it!"

"Then, as we know that Midshipman Totten was your assailant," continued the superintendent, "we shall have to place that young man on trial. We shall be obliged to summon you as a witness at that trial, Mr. Crane."

"But I have no intention, sir, of appearing as a witness," blustered that young man.

"Mr. Crane, you can have no choice in the matter. If we summon you, you can be brought here from any part of the United States."

"I—I—can't the matter be dropped, sir?" urged the young man anxiously.

"Not unless you confess yourself in the wrong, and exonerate Mr. Totten. In any other event the case will have to come to trial before a court-martial, and you, Mr. Crane, since we are certain that you possess material evidence, will be forced to appear as a witness."

Mr. Crane looked almost as uncomfortable as he felt.

"Mr. Totten," continued the superintendent, "states that you grossly insulted his cousin, a young woman, and that he met you on purpose to avenge that insult."

"There—there—was some trouble about a young woman," admitted Crane. "But I am a gentleman, sir."

"I am not expected to decide the last question that you have raised," replied the superintendent dryly. "All that concerns me in the matter is whether you exonerate Mr. Totten, or whether you do not. If you do not, the midshipman must state his case fully before a court-martial, at which you will be one of the important witnesses."

"I exonerate Mr. Totten," replied Crane in a very low tone.

"Do you exonerate him completely?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then Mr. Totten's offense will be reduced to one or two simple breaches of discipline," went on the superintendent.

"But see here, sir," interposed one of the other young men, "are your midshipmen to be allowed to go about pounding whom they like? Are they to be swashbucklers and bullies?"

"Very decidedly not, sir," replied the superintendent in a voice almost thunderous. "The midshipmen of the United States Naval Acad-

emy must conduct themselves as gentlemen at all times."

"Did they do that," urged the last speaker, "when they sailed into us as they did?"

"Why did your friends go to the assistance of Mr. Crane?" asked the superintendent.

"Be—because," stammered the spokesman, "your midshipman had knocked Crane down and was misusing him."

"Did you, the friends of Mr. Crane, consider it the act of gentlemen for several to rush in and attack one man?"

That left the callers rather breathless.

"Now, as to our other three midshipmen," pursued the superintendent, "at most they only rushed in to see fair play. They did not make a hostile move until they saw a whole crowd of you attacking one midshipman. Gentlemen, I am quite ready to leave it to a jury of any intelligent citizens as to whether the offending midshipmen or yourselves displayed the more gallantry and honor. For you have all admitted doing something that is not consistent with the highest standards of a gentleman, while our accused midshipmen have no such reproach against them."

"Then your midshipmen are to get off, and to be encouraged to repeat such conduct?" demanded the spokesman of the Crane party.

"No. On the contrary, they will be punished for whatever breaches of Naval discipline they have committed. Considering what you gentlemen have admitted, however, I do not believe you would have any standing as witnesses before a court-martial. I therefore advise you all to drop your complaint. Yet if you insist on a complaint, then I will see to it that Midshipman Totten is brought to trial."

Crane and his associates felt, very quickly and keenly, that they would cut but sorry figures in such a trial. They therefore begged to withdraw their former complaint. When they had departed the superintendent smiled at his reflection in the glass opposite.

Before supper all of the midshipmen involved knew their fate. They were restored to full liberty. Darrin, Dalzell and Joyce were again rebuked for having taken such elaborate pains to escape recognizing Totten at the time of the encounter. Beyond the lecture by the commandant of midshipmen, each of the trio was further punished by the imposition of ten demerits.

In Frenching and in taking justice into his own hands Midshipman Totten was held to have erred. However, the nature of his grievance and the fact that he was only a new fourth classman were taken into consideration. For

Frenching he was punished with twenty-five demerits; for the assault on a civilian, considering all the circumstances, he was let off with ten additional demerits.

Yet, somehow, all of the midshipmen involved felt their punishment very lightly. They could not escape the conviction that the Naval Academy authorities did not regard them as especially guilty offenders.

"We've got you back on the gridiron, at any rate," exclaimed Hepson exultantly. "We of the football squad wish that we might be permitted to divide your demerits up among ourselves."

"You might suggest that little point to the commandant of midshipmen," grinned Dan.

"And get jolly well trounced for our impudence," grimaced Midshipman Hepson. "No, thank you; though you criminals have our utmost sympathy, we will let matters rest where they are at present. Only a fool tries to change well enough into worse."

CHAPTER XV

THE NAVY GOAT WEEPS

"DID you hear that Ella had a bad tumble down three stories?" asked Midshipman Dan.

"Ella who?" questioned Dave, looking up.

"Elevator!" grinned Dalzell.

"Ugh!" grunted Dave disgustedly. "Say, do you know how that would strike the com.?"

"No," replied Dan innocently, looking away. "How would it strike him?"

"Hard!" Dave responded. Slam! The somewhat heavy book that Darrin aimed went straight to the mark, landing against Dan's nearer ear with all the force of a sound boxing.

"I see you appreciate a good joke," muttered Dalzell grimly.

"Yes," Dave admitted. "Do you?"

"When I tell you another," growled Dan, "I'll be holding an axe hidden behind my back."

"Say, did I show you that letter of Dick's?" Dave asked, looking up presently.

"Appendix?" inquired Dan suspiciously.

"Oh, stow all that, little boy!" retorted Dave. "No; did I tell you that I had a letter from Dick Prescott?"

"I think you mentioned something of the sort, last winter," Dalzell admitted still suspicious.

"No; I got one this morning from good old Dick," Darrin went on.

"All right," Dan agreed. "What's the answer?"

"I haven't had time to read it yet," Darrin responded. "But here's the letter. Maybe you'd like to look it over."

Across the study table Dan Dalzell received the envelope and its enclosure rather gingerly. Dan didn't like to be caught "biting" at a "sell," and he still expected some trick from his roommate.

It was, however, a letter written in Dick Prescott's well-remembered handwriting.

"I understand that you are both on the Navy team, and that you made good in the first game," wrote the West Point cadet. "I hope you'll both stay in to the finish, and improve with every game. Greg and I are plugging hard at the game in the little time that the West Point routine allows us for practice. From what I have heard of your game, I think it likely that you and good, but impish old Dan, are playing against the very position that Greg and I hope to hold in the annual Army-Navy game. Won't it be great?"

"Yes, it will be great, all right, if the Navy contrives to win," Dan muttered, looking up at his chum.

"Either the Army or Navy must lose," replied Dave quietly.

"And just think!" Cadet Dick Prescott's letter ran on. "When we meet, lined up for battle on Franklin Field, Philadelphia, it will be the first time we four have met since we wound up the good old High School days at Gridley. It seems an age to Greg and me. I wonder if the time seems as long to you two?"

"It seems to me," remarked Dan, glancing across at his chum, "that you and I, David, little giant, have been here at Annapolis almost ever since we first donned trousers to please the family."

"It is a long time back to Gridley days," assented Darrin.

Then Dan went on reading.

"Of course you and Dan are bound that the Navy shall win this year," Dick had written. "As for Greg and me, we are equally determined that the Army shall win. As if the resolutions on either side had much of anything to do with it! It will seem strange for us four, divided between the two sides, to be fighting frantically for the victory. However, if Greg and I go up against you two on the gridiron we won't show

you any mercy, and we know that we shall receive none from you. Each man must do all that's possibly in him for the glory of his own side of the United Service! Here's to the better eleven—Army or Navy!"

"I'll bet Dick and Greg will give us all the tussle they know how, if they get near us in the fight," nodded Dan, passing the letter back.

"Well, they're bound to, aren't they?" demanded Darrin. "And now, Danny boy, we simply must stow all gab and get busy with our lessons. We've a recitation between now and the afternoon practice."

"And the game, to-morrow!" breathed Midshipman Dalzell fervently.

The morrow's game was to be against the University of Pennsylvania eleven. The opposition team being an unusually good one that year, the Navy's gridiron pets were preparing to strain every nerve in the hope of victory.

In that afternoon's practice Dave and Dan showed up better than ever. Farley and Page, too, were coming along splendidly, while Midshipman Joyce was proving himself all but a joy to exacting Hepson.

But when the morrow came U. P. carried away the game to the tune of five to nothing, and the Navy goat wept. Dave and Dan made several brilliant plays, but the Navy average both

of size and skill was somewhat below that of the older, bigger college men.

Other games followed fast now, and the Navy eleven and its subs. had plenty of work cut out for them. Up to the time of the Army-Navy game, the middies had a bright slate of eighty per cent. of victories. Dave and Dan had the pleasure of reading, in the "Army and Navy Journal," that they were considered the strongest men on the left flank that the Navy had been able to show in ten years.

"When we go up against the Army," Hepson informed Dave and Dan, "I don't know whether you'll play at left or right. It will all depend on where the Army puts Prescott and Holmes. Friends of ours who have watched the play at West Point tell me that Prescott and Holmes are armored terrors on the gridiron."

"They are, if they've gone forward in the game, instead of backward," Darrin replied honestly.

"But you and Dalzell can hold 'em, can't you?" demanded Hepson anxiously.

"I don't dare brag," Dave answered. "The truth, if anything, is that Danny boy and I can hardly hope to hold the Army pair back. You see, Hep, I know Prescott and Holmes pretty well, from the fact that we played together on the same High School eleven for two

years. Prescott, in fact, was the boy who trained us all."

"Well, don't let the Navy fellows get the idea that you're afraid of that Army pair," begged Hepson. "It might get our men discouraged. Darry, we simply must wipe up the field with the Army! There isn't—there can't be any such word as 'defeat' for us."

As the time drew near for the greatest of all annual games the instructors at the Naval Academy began to record lower marks for nearly all of the men in the daily recitations. The midshipmen simply couldn't keep their minds from wandering to the gridiron. It meant so much—to beat the Army!

Then quickly enough the feverish day came. Early in the forenoon the entire brigade of midshipmen, in uniform, was marched into town behind the Naval Academy band. Scores of Navy officers, with their ladies, went along. A lot of the townspeople followed in the big rush to Odenton and Baltimore. From there two sections of a special train conveyed the Annapolis host to Philadelphia.

Franklin Field was reached, and one of the most brilliant athletic and social events of the year was on.

We shall not attempt to follow the course of the game here. The Navy eleven hurled itself

into the fray with undying heroism, but the Army won the great game. It is all told in the third volume of "The West Point Series," entitled "Dick Prescott's Third Year at West Point." In that volume, too, is described the meeting of the old-time High School chums, their first meeting since the old-time days back in the home town of Gridley.

The game was over at last. The Navy was crestfallen, though not a sign of sorrow or humiliation showed in the jaunty step of the men of the brigade as they marched back to the railway station and took the train for the first stage of the journey home—the run between Philadelphia and Baltimore.

On the train Hepson hunted up Dave and Dan.

"You did your best, fellows, I know that," murmured the defeated football captain. "And you gave me, in advance, a fair estimate of that Army pair, Prescott and Holmes. Say, but they're a pair of terrors! If we had that pair on the Navy eleven, along with you two, no team that the Army ever yet sent out could beat us. But we made a strong fight, at any rate. All of our friends say that."

"I'm glad I didn't do any bragging in advance," Darrin smiled wistfully. "We were fairly eaten up, Hep."

"Oh, well, we'll hope for better luck next year,

with the Navy under some other captain. Maybe you'll be captain next year, Darry."

"I don't want to be," Dave answered, with a shake of his head. "If you couldn't carry our team to victory I don't dare try."

"Then I'll be captain—if I'm asked," promised Dan, with the grin that always lurked close to the surface of his face. While hundreds of midshipmen felt desperately blue on the homeward journey, Dalzell had already nearly forgotten his disappointment.

"You'll never be asked," predicted Hepson good-humoredly. "Danny boy, the trouble with you would be that the fellows would never know when you were in earnest. As captain of the eleven, you might start to give an order, and then nothing but a pun would come forth. You're too full of mischief to win victories."

"I hope that won't be true if I ever have the luck to command a battleship in war time," sighed Dalzell, becoming serious for four or five seconds. Then he bent forward and dropped a cold nickel inside of Joyce's collar. The cold coin coursed down Joyce's spine, causing that tired and discouraged midshipman to jump up with a yell.

"Why does the com. ever allow that five-year-old imp to travel with men?" grunted Joyce disgustedly, as he sat down again and

now realized that the nickel was under him next to the skin.

"Danny boy," groaned Dave, "will you ever grow up? Why do you go on making a pest of yourself?"

"Why, the fellows need some cheering up, don't they?" Dan inquired.

"If you don't look out, Danny boy, you'll rouse them to such a pitch of cheerfulness that they'll raise one of the car windows and drop you outside for sheer joy."

The joy that had been manifest in Annapolis that morning was utterly stilled when the brigade reached the home town once more. True, the band played as a matter of duty, but as the midshipmen marched down Maryland Avenue in brigade formation they passed many a heap of faggots and many a tar-barrel that had been placed there by the boys of the town to kindle into bonfires with which to welcome the returning victors. But to-night the faggot-piles and the tar-barrels lay unlighted. In the dark this material for bonfires that never were lighted looked like so many spectral reminders of their recent defeat.

It hurt! It always hurts—either the cadets or the midshipmen—to lose the Army-Navy game.

Once back at quarters in Bancroft Hall, it

seemed to many of the midshipmen as though it would have been a relief to have to go to study tables to work. Yet, since no work was actually required on this night, none was done.

Midshipmen wandered about in their own rooms and visited. The more they realized the defeat, the bluer they became. From some rooms came sounds of laughter, but it was hollow.

Farley got out a banjo, breaking into a lively darky reel. Yet, somehow, the sound was mournful.

"Please stop that dirge and play something cheerful!" begged the voice of a passing midshipman.

"Put the lyre away, Farl," advised Page. "Nothing sounds happy to-night."

"We love to sing and dance. We're happy all the day—ha, ha!" wailed Dan Dalzell. He wasn't so very blue himself, but he was trying to keep in sympathy with the general tone of feeling.

"Well, Hep, you made as good a showing, after all, as could be expected with a dub team," spoke Joyce consolingly, when they met in a corridor.

"It wasn't a dub team," retorted Hepson dismally. "The eleven was all right. The only trouble lay in having a dub for a captain."

It was a relief to hundreds that night when

taps sounded at last, and the master switch turned off the lights in midshipmen quarters. At least the young men were healthy and did not waste hours in wooing sleep and forgetfulness.

Then Sunday morning came, and the football season was over until the next year.

"From now on it's going to be like starting life all over again, after a fire," was the way Dan put it that Sunday morning, in an effort to make some of his comrades feel that all was not lost.

Had Dan been able to foresee events which he and Dave must soon encounter, even that grinning midshipman wouldn't have been happy.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN WITH A SCOWL ON TAP

"I WISH we lived in Annapolis, that we might be here at every hop!" sighed Belle Meade, as the waltz finished and she and Dave, flushed and happy, sought seats at the side of the ballroom.

They had hardly seated themselves when they were joined by Dan and Laura Bentley.

"I was just saying, Laura," Belle went on, "that it would be splendid if we lived here all through the winter. Then we'd have a chance to come to every hop."

"Wouldn't we want to put in a part of the winter near West Point?" asked Miss Bentley, smiling, though with a wistful look in her eyes.

"Perhaps that would be fairer, to you," Belle agreed.

"You'd soon get tired of the hops," ventured Dave.

"Can one ever weary of dancing?" Belle demanded. "Well, perhaps one might, though never on the small amount that has come to me so far in life. And this Navy orchestra plays so divinely!"

"Our number's next, I believe, ladies," called

Midshipman Farley, as he and Page came up, eager for their chances with these two very charming belles of the hop.

"Hang you, Farl!" muttered Dave.

"That's just like Darrin, Miss Meade," laughed Farley. "He's always a monopolist at heart. Though in this instance I am far from wondering at his desire to be."

It was the first hop after the semi-annual exams. A host of fourth classmen and some from the upper classes had been dropped immediately after the examinations, but Dave and Dan and all their more intimate friends in the brigade had pulled through. Darrin and Dalzell had come out of the ordeal with the highest markings they had yet achieved at the Naval Academy.

Mrs. Meade had come down to Annapolis to chaperon Belle and Laura, but this evening Mrs. Meade was chatting with a middle-aged Naval officer and so did not see much of the young people.

As the music struck up, Farley and Page claimed consideration, Dave and Dan were left without partners.

"Nothing more doing for two dances, David, little giant," murmured Midshipman Dalzell. "Suppose we slip into our overcoats and walk around outside."

"I'd rather," assented Darrin. "It's dull in here when a fellow isn't dancing."

It was a night of unusually light attendance on the part of the fair sex, with a rather larger attendance than usual of midshipmen, for which reason Dave found many other midshipmen outside, strolling up and down.

"What we need, fellows," called Joyce, coming up to the chums, "is a new regulation that no midshipman may attend a hop unless he drags a femme."

"That would have shut you out of every hop so far this year," laughed Dave.

"I know it," Joyce admitted. "But I'm going to cut all hops after this, unless some real queen will favor me as her escort and agree to dance at least half the numbers with me. I've had only two dances this evening. It's too tame. I'm going back to Bancroft Hall and stand ready to turn in at the first signal. What's the use of hanging around at a hop when there's only one girl to every five fellows?"

"You have suffered the just fate of the free lance," remarked Dan Dalzell virtuously. "As for me, I never think of attending a hop unless I squire some femme thither."

"There used to be girls enough last year," complained Joyce. "Well, I'm off for home and bed."

"We'll stroll along up with you," proposed Darrin.

"No girls for you, either?"

"Not for two numbers. Then we return to the young ladies that we escorted here."

"Just to think," grunted Joyce, sniffing in the salt air that reached them from the water-front, "a good deal more than a year more here before we get regularly at sea."

"It seems as though we'd been here a long time," sighed Dave. "But I don't suppose there was ever a midshipman yet who didn't long to get away from Annapolis and into the real, permanent life on the wave. A West Point man must feel some of the same longing."

"But he's on the land at West Point," objected Joyce, "and he's still on land after he graduates and goes to some post. The Army cadet has no such glorious future to look forward to as has a midshipman."

"Hello, here's Jet," called Dave as a midshipman enveloped in his overcoat approached them. "Going to the hop, Jet?"

"Will you do me a great favor?" asked Midshipman Jetson.

"Certainly, if possible," agreed Dave cordially.

"Then mind your own business," snapped the other midshipman.

Darrin, who had made it a point to forget the brief unpleasantness of the football season, received this rebuke with about the same feelings that a slap in the face would have given him.

The sulky midshipman had stepped past the trio, but Dave, after swallowing hard, wheeled about and hailed:

"Hold on, there, Mr. Jetson!"

"Well?" demanded Jetson, halting and looking back.

"I don't like your tone, sir."

"And I don't like your face, sir," retorted Jetson. "Nor your cheek, either, for that matter."

"I tried to treat you pleasantly," Dave went on, hurt and offended.

"Oh! It required an effort, did it?" sneered Jetson.

"Something may have happened that I don't know anything about," Darrin continued. "It may be that you have some real reason for treating me as you have just done. If you have any good reason I wish you'd tell me, for in that case I must have done something that put me in wrong. If that's the case, I want to make amends."

"Oh—bosh!" grumbled the other midshipman.

"Come on, now!" urged Dave. "Be a man!"

"Then you imply that I am not?" demanded Jetson aggressively.

"Not necessarily," Dave contended. "I just want to make sure, in my own mind, and I should think you'd be similarly interested."

"If you want to insult me, Mr. Darrin," flared back Jetson, "I'll remain here long enough to hear you and to arrange for resenting the insult. Otherwise——"

"Well?" insisted Dave quietly, though his anger was rising. "Otherwise?"

"Otherwise," retorted Midshipman Jetson, "I'll pursue my way and seek company that pleases me better."

"Look out, Jet, old hot-plate!" laughed Joyce. "You'll soon be insulting all three of us."

"I don't intend to," Jetson rejoined quickly. "My quarrel concerns only Mr. Darrin."

"Oho!" murmured Dave. "There is a quarrel, then?"

"If you choose to pick one."

"But I don't, Mr. Jetson. Quarreling is out of my line. If I've done you any harm or any injustice I'm ready to make good by apologies and otherwise. And, if I haven't wronged you in any way, you should be equally manly and apologize for your treatment of me just now."

"Oh, bosh!" snapped Mr. Jetson once more.

"This is none of my quarrel," interposed Midshipman Joyce, "and I'm not intentionally a promoter of hard feeling. But it seems to me, Jet, that Darry has spoken as fairly as any fellow could. Now, it seems to me that it's up to you to be equally manly."

"So you, too, are asserting that I'm not manly," bristled Mr. Jetson haughtily. "You all seem bound to force trouble on me to-night."

"Not I, then," retorted Joyce, his spirit rising. "I'm finding myself forced to the belief that you're hardly worth having trouble with."

Jetson clenched his fists, taking a step forward, his dark eyes flashing. Then he halted, as though implying that he was not thus easily to be driven into forgetting himself.

"Come along, fellows," urged Dan Dalzell in a low voice. "Mr. Jetson seems to have no intention either of explaining or of affording other satisfaction."

"Hold on, Mr. Jetson, you needn't answer him," interposed Darrin quickly, as Jetson opened his mouth. "First of all this affair seems to concern me. You've intimated that I'm no friend of yours and not worthy to be ranked as such. Now, I ask you, fairly and flatly, what has brought your mind to this pitch? What have I done, or what haven't I done?"

"Search your conscience," jeered Jetson.

"I've been doing so ever since this foolish conversation started, and I haven't found the answer yet. All I recall, Jetson, is that, at the outset of my football practice, there was some little unpleasantness between us. You injured me, twice, in practice play, and I admit that I was somewhat angry about it at the time. But you gave your word that you hadn't intended any tricks against me. I believed you to be a man of honor, and I accepted your word that you were innocent of evil intention against me. Having accepted your word, I held no further grudge in the matter, and I have as nearly forgotten the whole business as a man with a memory can."

"Then tell me why I didn't play on the football eleven?" flamed up Midshipman Jetson.

"Principally, I imagine, because Captain Hepson, after consultation with the coaches, didn't call you to the Navy eleven."

"And why didn't Hepson call me?" followed up Jetson, all his pent-up sulkiness boiling over now.

"I don't know, particularly. Probably, I imagine, for the same reason that he didn't call a lot of other men to the eleven—because he believed he could make a better choice."

"Darrin, you know well enough that you so influenced Hepson to keep me off the team!"

"Jetson, are you mad?"

"No; but I'm naturally angry."

"I give you my word that I didn't do anything to prevent your making the team."

"And you expect me, Mr. Darrin, to believe that?"

"If you decline to do so, it amounts to passing the lie. But I'll overlook that for a moment. Joyce, I think Hepson is not dancing at present. Will you return to the hop, and, if he is not dancing, will you bring him out here?"

"I don't want to see Hepson," cried Midshipman Jetson. "You're the only one I'm interested in in this matter, Mr. Darrin."

"You've virtually refused to accept my word."

"I do so refuse."

"Then you call me——"

"A liar, if you like!" snapped back Midshipman Jetson.

"Sir, do you realize——"

"I realize that you're still talking!" sneered Jetson.

"Then I won't talk any longer," replied Dave Darrin in a quiet but dangerous voice. "Since you refuse to listen even to Hepson——"

"Who's taking my name in vain?" demanded a laughing voice as a burly figure moved in between Dave and his enemy.

The new-comer was Hepson, who had come upon the group unnoticed.

"Perhaps you're just in time, Hep," murmured Dave, fighting to cool down his temper. "I wanted you to prove——"

"Stop!" ejaculated Jetson angrily. In his extreme passion he threw all restraint and courtesy to the winds. "I wouldn't take the word of Hepson, or of any man in the entire brigade in this matter. Darrin has lied, and——"

"Step aside, Hep, please," urged Dave, giving the late football captain a gentle shove. "This matter can't go any further in words. Mr. Jetson, you have insulted me, and grossly. Are you capable of cooling down? Do you wish to retract?—to apologize?"

"Apolozize to you—you——"

Whatever the word was, it didn't get out, for in the same instant Darrin cried warningly:

"Guard yourself!"

Midshipman Jetson threw up his hands, but Darrin's right fist landed across his offending mouth with such force as to fell the sulky midshipman flat to the earth.

CHAPTER XVII

AN AFFAIR OF SULKS

HAVING struck the blow, Midshipman Darrin stepped back, to give his opponent an unobstructed chance to rise to his feet.

"What's this all about?" demanded Midshipman Hepson wonderingly.

"It's gone too far for talk, now," replied Dan Dalzell. "Wait until Darry has put a new head on this idiot."

Jetson took his time about getting to his feet. When he did rise he didn't assume his guard at once.

"Well," asked Darrin coolly, but mockingly, "have you had all you can stand, or are you going to back up your wild, crazy statements?"

Suddenly Jetson raised one of his feet quickly, as though to kick Dave in the belt line.

"Here, stop that!" cried Hepson and Joyce in the same breath, as they sprang forward. Darrin, seeing others interfere, didn't attempt to strike back, but merely stepped aside.

That was the chance for which Jetson had been watching. His kick didn't land; he hadn't intended that it should, but Dave's surprised

recoil gave the other the chance that he really wanted. Both of Jetson's fists struck on Dave's nose, drawing a flood of the crimson.

"You coward! You cur!" gasped amazed Dalzell.

"Silence, all!" ordered Hepson, speaking by virtue of being a first classman. "Jet is crazy, but he can't be expected to take up more than one affair at a time. Darry, take your time to stop the flow of blood. Then you can demand an accounting of Jetson."

"I've nothing more to say," remarked Jetson. "I was struck and I've returned the blow with interest. That ends my concern in the affair. Good night, all."

"Hold on!" ordered Hepson, bounding forward and laying a strong, detaining hand on Jetson's shoulder. "You can't slip away like that. Matters have gone so far that they'll simply have to go further. You'd put yourself wholly in the wrong by withdrawing now—especially after the slimy trick that you've played a fair opponent."

"Slimy, eh?" cried Jetson angrily. "Mr. Hepson, you and I will have to have an accounting, too!"

"Oh, just as you like," responded the first classman, shrugging his shoulders. "You'll find it a better rule, however, to stick to one affair

at a time. Darry, are you in shape, now, to attend to this matter from your point of view?"

"Quite," nodded Dave, who had about succeeded in stanching the flow of blood from his injured nose. "Does Mr. Jetson desire to take his coat off or not?"

"Yes!" cried Jetson tempestuously, unbuttoning his own overcoat and tossing it to the ground. "Now, take yours off, Mr. Darrin!"

"It's off," responded Dave, tossing the garment aside. "Now, look to yourself, sir!"

The two second classmen closed in furiously. It was give and take, for a few moments. In the clinches, however, Jetson succeeded in tearing Darrin's dress coat, and also in starting the blood again so that the crimson dripped down on Dave's white shirt front.

At the end of a full minute, however, Darrin had sent his enemy to the ground, stopped in a knock-out. Both of Jetson's eyes were also closed and badly swollen.

"Joyce," asked Hepson, "will you kindly remain with Jetson and see that he is assisted to the hospital, if he needs it? It won't do for too many of us, especially Darry, to be found here by any officer who may be passing."

"I'll attend to it," nodded Midshipman Joyce, "though I'd rather perform the service for any other fellow in the brigade."

Now that the affair was over, and Dave, after inspecting the damage to his dress coat, was pulling on his overcoat, he was suddenly recalled to other responsibilities.

"Danny boy," he said ruefully, as Hepson walked away with them, "I can't very well get back to the hop soon—perhaps not at all tonight. I can't go back in this torn coat, and I may not be able to borrow another that will fit me well. Will you be good enough to hurry back and explain to Belle why I am delayed—perhaps prevented from seeing her again tonight?"

"Certainly," nodded Dalzell, turning and hastening back.

"Now, what was it all about, Darry?" asked Hepson, as he walked along with Dave.

Midshipman Darrin explained the trouble as well as he could.

"So the idiot accused you of keeping him off the football eleven?" demanded Hepson in astonishment.

"Yes; and I offered to prove, by you, that I had nothing to do with his exclusion from the team."

"Why the sole and whole reason why Jetson wasn't called to the Navy team," declared Hepson, "was because he was believed to be too awkward and too dangerous to other players.

Whew, but I'm certainly sorry this thing has happened!"

"So am I," Dave confessed candidly.

"And Jet made the further fool mistake of declaring that he wouldn't accept the word of any midshipman in the brigade."

"Something of the sort."

"Why, that's a wholesale, blanket insult to the whole brigade. Darry, your class will have to take action over such a remark as that."

"Oh, Jetson uttered the remark in the heat of an exceptional temper."

"That won't save him," predicted Hepson sagely. "The insult is there and it will stick. Your class, Darry, would lose caste with the fellows here if it allowed such an insult to go."

"Well, if it gets around, I suppose some sort of action will have to be taken."

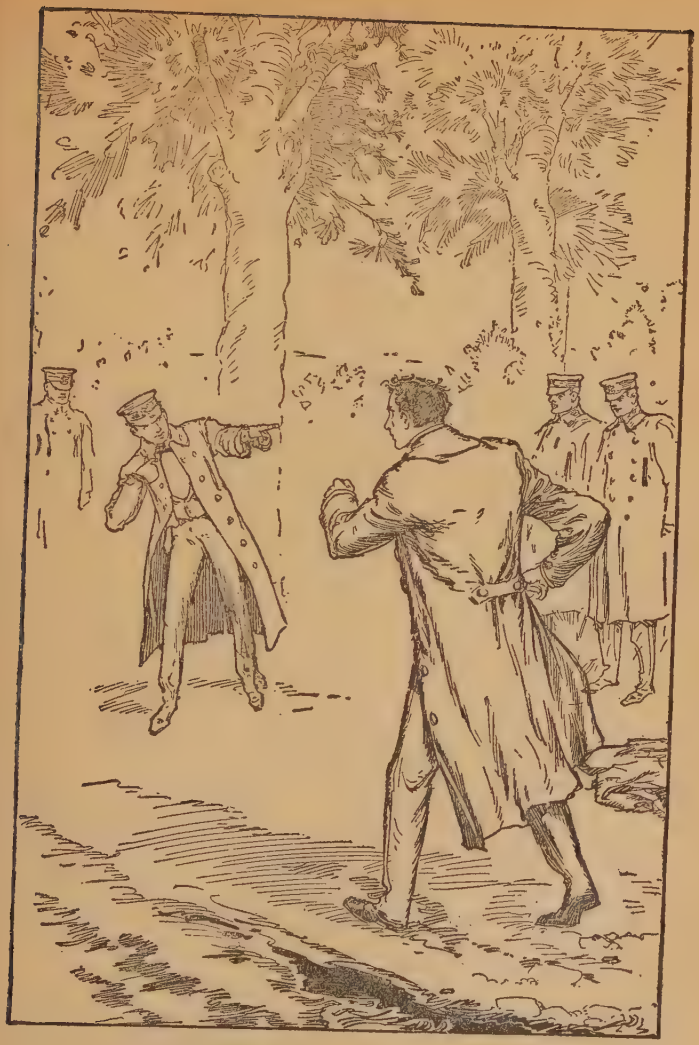
"The second class, under the circumstances, can't do much less than send Jetson to Coventry."

"Oh, that would be too much!" Dave protested generously. "Jetson has always been an honorable, square fellow in the past."

"He has always been infernally sulky and high-handed," growled Midshipman Hepson.

"A bad temper is not such an uncommon failing," smiled Dave.

"No; but there are limits to the amount of



"Take Off Your Overcoat, Mr. Darrin."

temper that a gentleman may display and still be worthy to associate with gentlemen," contended Hepson stubbornly. "It's the insult to the whole brigade that I'm thinking of. Darry, I'll wager that your class won't and can't do less than give Jetson a trip to Coventry."

"Oh, that would be too much—unjust!" protested Dave.

"The class will do it just the same."

"If the class mixes up in my affair, and carries it so far as to send Jetson to Coventry, I'll be hanged if I don't go there with him!" cried Darrin impulsively.

The words were out. A man of Darrin's honest nature would feel bound to stand by even that heated utterance.

"Oh, come, now, Darry, don't be so foolish over a fellow who has treated you in such fashion."

"I've said it, haven't I?" asked Dave grimly. "It would be an utter injustice, and I'm not going to see something that is my own affair distorted into an injustice that would be altogether out of proportion to Jetson's offense."

By this time the strolling pair of midshipmen had reached the entrance to Bancroft Hall.

"What are you going to try to do about your dress coat, Darry?" asked Hepson in an undertone. "Borrow one?"

"If I can find one that fits."

"Take my advice, then. Don't just borrow, and thereby run a chance of getting both yourself and the lender in trouble. For of course you know that one can never tell when an inspection may be made, and the man whose dress coat was gone would have to account for it. So go to the O. C., state that your coat was accidentally torn, and ask permission to borrow one in order that you may return and escort your ladies back to the hotel. Your O. C. won't raise any objection to that."

"But he might want to see the coat that I have on," grimaced Dave. "Then the O. C. would be sure to see the blood-drips on my shirt front, or the collar, at least. Then talk of a mere accident might lead to questions as to the nature of the accident."

"True," nodded Hepson. "Then get back to your room. Get out clean linen and get into it. While you're doing that I'll negotiate the loan of a dress coat that will fit. Then you can go to the O. C., after you've changed the telltale linen."

This course, accordingly, was followed. Dave changed his linen as quickly as he could, while Hepson appeared with three borrowed dress coats for a try-on. One was found to fill the bill. Resting it over a chair, Darrin slipped on his

service blouse and reported to the O. C. Permission was granted to borrow a dress coat. If the officer in charge felt any suspicion or curiosity as to the nature of the accident he cleverly concealed the fact.

A good deal of time, however, had been consumed. By the time that Midshipman Dave Darrin returned to the hop the orchestra was just breaking into the strains of "Home, Sweet Home."

Dave's quick glance roved the floor and the seats. He beheld Belle Meade, seated at the side, while Farley bent over her in an inviting attitude. Darrin quickly reached the scene. Belle saw him coming, just in time to refrain from taking Farley's arm.

"You won't mind this time, will you, Farl?" Dave asked, smiling.

"I had given you up," said Belle, as they moved away together in the dance.

"Of course Dan told you what had delayed me."

"He told me you would return as soon as you could," replied Miss Meade, "but he was provokingly mysterious as to the cause of your absence."

"There was a little trouble," Dave whispered.

"Are you in trouble?" asked Belle quickly, her cheeks paling.

"No; I think not. By trouble I mean that I just took part in a fight."

"So you took the time when I am here as the most suitable occasion for a fight?" asked Belle, her color coming back and heightening.

"It isn't wise for me to explain it now, Belle," Dave told her quickly. "You won't blame me when you know. But I'd rather save it for telling when we are out of the Academy grounds."

"Oh, just as you like. Dave, we mustn't let anything spoil what's left of this last short dance of the night."

"Thank you, Belle. These dances together don't happen any too frequently."

It was when the young people were walking back to the Maryland Hotel, and Mrs. Meade had joined Dan and Laura, that Belle again asked the nature of the trouble that had deprived Darrin of three of his dances with her.

Dave told the story, briefly, adding:

"Under the midshipmen's code, the blow had to be struck when the lie was passed."

"I don't blame you for knocking the fellow down," Belle agreed indignantly. "What a worthless fellow that Mr. Jetson must be!"

"Do you know, Belle, I can't quite bring myself to believe that he is worthless?"

"His conduct shows it," argued the girl.

"At first thought it would appear so, but Jet-

son, I believe, is only the victim of an unhappy temper that makes him suspicious and resentful. He's brave enough, and he's never been caught in a dishonorable trick."

"Except the tricks he played on you at the football practice."

"He passed his word that he intended no trick, and I have been wholly inclined to take his word in the matter."

"Dave, you must look out for this man Jetson! He's going to get you into some trouble before you're through with him," exclaimed Belle earnestly. All her instinct was aroused in the matter, for Dave Darrin's success was dearer to Belle Meade than was anything else in the world.

"There are two things that I regret very much to-night," Dave went on. "One was that Jetson should provoke such a senseless dispute, and the other that I should be obliged to miss so much of your company here at Annapolis."

"I wouldn't mind anything," Belle answered, "if I could feel sure that no more trouble would come out of this affair with Jetson."

"I don't believe there will be any disturbing outcome," Dave assured her; "unless, possibly, another fight."

"A fight is nothing," declared Belle with spirit. "You're in training to become a fighting

man, and a bout or two at fisticuffs is nothing more or less than so much valuable experience. Dave, promise me something?"

"Of course, if it's anything promisable."

"You'll write me——"

"Can you doubt that, Belle?"

"And let me know exactly and truthfully if anything further comes of this," she finished.

"I'll write and tell you anything that a midshipman is at liberty to make known concerning the conduct of the brigade."

"Just what does that cover?" asked Belle.

"I can't easily answer until the something or other happens to turn up."

"At any rate, Dave, if I get a suspicion that you're withholding from me anything that I ought to know, I shall be dreadfully worried. You can't have any idea how worried I have been about you sometimes in the past."

Not much time was there for the two midshipmen to remain at the foot of the steps of the hotel. Then, after hearty good nights, Dave and Dan left the ladies, whom they would not see again until the next visit.

"From one or two things that I couldn't help overhearing, I judge that Belle is greatly worried over the possibility of trouble arising from the Jetson affair," remarked Dan on the way back to the Naval Academy and quarters.

"Yes," Dave admitted.

"Pooh! How can any trouble come to you out of the matter? With Jetson it's different. He declared that he wouldn't take the word of any midshipman in the brigade."

"That was spoken in the heat of temper. Jetson didn't mean it."

"Just the same, some of the fellows have heard of it already, and I shan't be surprised if our class holds a meeting and sends Jetson to Coventry—where the fellow belongs."

"If they send Jetson to Coventry," spoke Dave quietly though bluntly, "I shall go along to Coventry with him."

Dalzell halted, staring at his chum in open-mouthed wonder.

"You idiot!" blazed Dan in wrathful disgust.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CLASS MEETING SITS AS JURY

THREE days later the class meeting was held.

Jetson was especially impressed with the notion that he must attend, since he must appear as the accused. With one of his disposition it was quite natural that the young man should go before the class in a highly resentful mood.

After a few introductory remarks, Jetson was summoned by the class president to rise.

"Mr. Jetson," asked the class president, "do you intend to deny having made the remark imputed to you—that you would not take the word of any midshipman in the brigade?"

"I made the remark, after a measure, sir," Jetson replied. "What I said was that in a certain matter I would not take the word of any midshipman in the brigade if it went counter to my fixed belief."

"Mr. Jetson, don't you consider that, under the circumstances, that amounted to a statement of your unwillingness to accept the word of members of the brigade?"

"I should be sorry to have that construction

placed on my remark, Mr. President, for I know that nearly all the men of the brigade are men with a fine sense of honor."

"Then how do you reconcile this statement with your other one?"

"Mr. President, I meant, and I still mean, that I am so certain of the truth of the charge that I made to one Darrin, that, if members of the brigade spoke differently, I would then know that they were not telling the truth."

A storm of protests went up, while one hoarse voice bellowed:

"Throw him out!"

And another called:

"Coventry!"

"Order!" commanded the class president, rapping hard with his gavel. "Mr. Jetson, it is a most serious matter to impugn the good faith and honor of the brigade. It is hardly mitigated by the fact that the words were uttered in the heat of passion, especially when, in your cooler moment, you are not inclined to retract your statement or to render it harmless. I believe, therefore, that I am in accord with the sense of this meeting of the class when I ask you if you have any retraction or apology to offer."

"For the statement, in the form in which I offered it, Mr. President, I have no retraction

or apology to offer, and only such explanation as I have lately given."

"Coventry! Coventry!" came the insistent call.

"Well, then, you can send me to Coventry, you friends of Darrin, if you feel yourselves justified in doing it!" quivered Midshipman Jetson, tossing his head and glaring defiantly around the room.

"Mr. President!"

"Mr. Wentworth."

"In view of the charge, and the subsequent statements of Mr. Jetson, I feel that we have an unpleasant duty to perform. The brigade is founded and based on honor. We, the members, cannot allow that honor to be impugned by one who would otherwise be fitted to be a member of the brigade. As Mr. Jetson refuses to retract his words, and as some one must take the initiative, it is my disagreeable duty to move you, sir, that the second class decide that Mr. Jetson is no longer worthy to be of our number, and that he accordingly be sent to Coventry."

"Mr. President!"

"Mr. Page."

"Mr. President, I desire to second the motion, and this I do as regretfully as it was moved."

"Oh, go ahead and send me to Coventry,

then!" Jetson blazed forth angrily. "This class appears to have been hypnotized by Darrin. But, even if you do send me to Coventry, we shall see whether your action will be potent enough to drive me from the Naval Academy!"

Waving his arms wildly in the heat of his anger, Midshipman Jetson hurried from the room, midshipmen moving aside to favor his swift exit.

Hardly had the door banged when from all parts of the room the cry went up:

"Question! question! Put the motion."

"Mr. President!"

"Mr. Darrin."

"I arise, sir, to discuss the motion. I ask the gentlemen of the class to bear with me patiently while I set forth some of the aspects of this matter as I see them.

"At the very outset, sir, I wish to make it as plain as possible that I do not seek to stand here as the apologist for Mr. Jetson. I feel very certain that he would not authorize me to take that position. What I state I am stating on my own authority purely, and therein I am only exercising my right as a member of the second class.

"I would remind you, sir, that you all know, as well as I do, that Mr. Jetson has always borne an honorable reputation in this class and in the

brigade. You all know his leading traits as well as I do. Mr. Jetson is a man of quick temper and rather lasting resentments. There is a good deal of sullenness in his nature——"

"And they're not the best qualities in a man who is being trained to command!" broke in a midshipman at the rear of the room.

"As to whether Mr. Jetson will be, by graduation time, well fitted to command men," Dave answered, "is not a question that this class is called upon to pass on. That question rests with the faculty of the Naval Academy. I am trying to get you to look at this matter only from the personal and the class point of view. Doubtless you all feel that Mr. Jetson is the victim of an unhappy temper. You would punish this frame of mind. Yet I ask you, bluntly, who among you have ever tried to aid Mr. Jetson in overcoming his own peculiar style of temper? If there is one among you who has made such attempt at aid, I ask that gentleman to stand until he can be recognized."

Dave made a pause, glancing around him, but no midshipman rose.

"Now, sir," continued Dave Darrin, "if we, as a class, take hasty and unwise action, it is quite possible that we may be depriving the United States Navy of a future officer who would be most valuable to his country in time of need.

Have we the right to punish when we are forced to admit that none of us has ever attempted to help Mr. Jetson to escape from the fruits of his temperament? Mr. President, how would you attempt to extinguish a fire? By fanning it? Yet, when a member of this class is smouldering in his own wrath, it is proposed to meet his sullenness by casting him out of our friendship. Do we not owe some duty to our country in this matter? Mr. Jetson is one of our capable students in this brigade, and if he be given a fair chance to graduate, he is likely to become a Naval officer of merit. Do we desire to take upon ourselves the probable smothering of such a Naval career? Mr. President, and you, gentlemen of the second class, I trust sincerely that the motion of Coventry in this case will not prevail. I feel, as I believe many of you now present feel, that we should be taking too much upon ourselves, and that we should be making a grave mistake. If the motion now before the class should be defeated, I shall then be delighted to second any other motion that has for its object the finding of some way to make Mr. Jetson feel more fully that he is one of us, that he has our full sympathy, and that we hope to see him mould his character into a form that will enable him to become a credit to the United States Navy."

As Darrin sat down there was a ripple of applause. There were many present, however, who took a sterner view of the affair. These wanted to see Jetson, and all others who might similarly offend the brigade, forced to quit the Naval service.

"Question! question!" called a score of voices at once.

"Any further remarks?" inquired the class president, glancing about.

"Mr. President!"

"Mr. Jerould."

"Mr. President," said Midshipman Jerould, "I am certain that we all appreciate the remarks of Mr. Darrin. The remarks were prompted by a generous heart, and we respect Mr. Darrin and his motives alike. But I am certain, sir, that the majority of us feel that this is an ugly business and that only stern treatment can meet the situation. I therefore trust that the motion will be at once put and passed." (Loud cries of "hear! hear!")

"Any further——"

"Mr. President!"

"Mr. Darrin."

"Mr. President, I wish I could throw my whole being and soul into this problem, in order to make it clearer, as I see it. I would even appeal, as a favor, to the class to quash this

Coventry resolution, and perhaps I might be considered to have some right to ask the favor, since the whole trouble grew out of an affair between Mr. Jetson and myself. I beg of you all, classmates, to quash the motion now before the class."

"No, no, no!" came the hearty response.

"Then, Mr. President and gentlemen," went on Dave Darrin in a voice slow and grave, "speaking for myself, as an individual member. I beg to state that I cannot respect a Coventry ordered under such circumstances In this matter I would find myself unable to respect the mandates of the cla s. Therefore. I beg you to send me to Coventry with Mr Jetson!"

Blank astonishment fell over the second class. Utter indignation seized some of the midshipmen. In another moment the feeling boiled up so that a few hisses rose.

Dave Darrin was pallid, but he had no desire to recede. He had acted according to the dictates of his conscience and he had kept his word.

In that pained instant Midshipman Farley sought to save the situation. He leaped to his feet, shouting:

"Mr. President, I move that this meeting adjourn!"

"Second the motion," called Page promptly, and now there was uproar on all sides.

CHAPTER XIX

DAVE STANDS ON PRINCIPLE

A MOTION to adjourn being always "in order," the class president put it.

"Aye!" came a thundering response.

"Contrary minded?"

"No."

The ayes appeared to have it, but the chair called for a showing of hands. Then the chair declared the class meeting adjourned.

"Hustle along with us, Darry. I want to talk with you!" sputtered Farley. He thrust an arm inside of Dave's and carried him along, Dalzell and Page following. Straight to Darrin's quarters they went.

"Now, then," demanded Farley, almost savagely, "what's the meaning of the very remarkable exhibition that you gave the class?"

"How was it remarkable?" questioned Dave.

"In your asking the class to send you to Coventry along with Jetson."

"It wasn't just to Jetson, just because he made a slip, that he should be shunned by the whole class."

"Couldn't the class decide that better than one man?" insisted Farley, his eyes gleaming.

"Without a doubt," Dave admitted. "I didn't attempt to do the deciding for the class. All I did was to try to throw my personal weight against it."

"And you compelled the class to adjourn without attending to Jetson's case."

"You're wrong, there, Farl."

"Didn't you?"

"I certainly didn't."

"Darry, you knew the class wouldn't vote to send you to Coventry just because you had ventured to give your opinion. Now, the only way the class could escape from the consequences of your action was to adjourn without action on Jetson."

"It was you, Farl, who moved to adjourn."

"Just to save a lot of hot-bloods from jumping on you, Darry. They'd have done it in another minute. The motion to adjourn was the only thing we could do."

"That's just it," nodded Midshipman Page.

"But there'll have to be another meeting called right away," Farley went on. "The brigade will expect it—will have a right to demand it. A member of our class has insulted the whole brigade, and under our old traditions only the second class can administer discipline."

"Well, then," pursued Darrin calmly, "when the new meeting is held Jetson and myself can

be punished, if that be the wish of the entire class."

"Darry," stormed Farley, "you've simply got to withdraw your fool remarks when the class comes together again."

"Do you expect that I'll do that?" Dave inquired.

"If you don't," retorted Farley warmly, "you won't be worth the further concern of your friends. What do you say, Danny boy?"

"From what I know of Dave Darrin," replied Dalzell, "the class will be wasting its time if it expects Darry to retract."

"But what do you want to be sent to Coventry for?" demanded Farley.

"I don't," Dave answered. "I know how it hurts. I wouldn't see any midshipman here sent to Coventry for anything except positive and undeniable dishonor. Jetson hasn't been guilty of anything worse than a mean, quick temper and a fit of sulks afterwards. That's why, with my experience here at Annapolis, if Jetson is to be sent to Coventry, I decline to be bound by the class action."

"But you can't refuse to be bound by class action," retorted Farley aghast.

"Try me and see," smiled Dave stubbornly.

"Don't be an idiot, Darry!"

"It would be a contemptible thing," Dave

went on, as calmly as before. "Coventry would mean the chasing of Jetson out of the brigade. You would ruin a man for a defect of temper that some of you others don't possess in quite the same degree. Is it fair to ruin any man because he has the misfortune to have a fit of sulks? That's why I won't heed the class action if it cuts Jetson. I'll bow to him whenever I meet him. I'll talk to him if he'll let me."

"But he won't," insisted Farley triumphantly. "No such sulky fellow as Jetson will let you make up to him."

"If he refuses," Dave contended, "then I can't help it. But I won't be a party to ruining the man. It would be far more to the purpose if the fellows would help the fellow to see that his sulkiness is his worst barrier here. Then a good student and naturally honorable fellow would develop into a capable Naval officer.

"That's the kind of talk for the padre" (chaplain), sniffed Farley.

"Glad you mentioned the padre," Dave retorted. "He's just the man to settle the case. Farley, I'll go with you to the padre at any time. You state one side of the case, and I'll state the other. If the padre doesn't back me, then I'll retract all I've said in open class meeting, and abide by whatever action the class may take."

"Oh, bother the padre!" snorted Farley angrily.

"All right, then," answered Dave good-humoredly. "If the class has a matter of ethics and morals that it doesn't dare submit to an expert in morals, then the class action is weak and wrong."

"There's no use talking to you, I'm afraid," sighed Farley ruefully. "But if you——"

Here the call to study interrupted further discussion. Farley, shaking his head gravely, left the room, followed by Page, who was shaking his head with equal force.

"If you think you're all right, David, little giant, go ahead," remarked Dalzell as he passed to his study desk.

"I think I'm right," Dave answered. "If not, I can be made to see the light. I don't claim to know everything, but what I've done I did in an effort to see and do the right thing."

When release from study came Dalzell expected to see several members of the class drop in. To his astonishment the minutes sped by without any knock at the door.

"You've gotten yourself in badly, Dave," Dan remarked at last. "The fellows don't even think it worth while to come here and remonstrate with you."

"For which I'm thankful," Darrin smiled.

"Danny boy, I'm going to bed without waiting for taps."

By morning the news of Dave's action at the class meeting was known throughout the brigade. As he strolled about for a few minutes, after breakfast, while Dan went back to his room to do some hurried study, Darrin noted that many once friendly faces were turned away from him.

"Good morning, Hepson," was Dave's greeting as his friend went by.

"Good morning," muttered Hepson, and was gone.

"Good morning, Watson," said Dave to one of his own classmates.

" 'Morning,' replied that midshipman briefly, and turned away. Joyce, Page and several other second classmen were standing in a group when Dave strolled in their direction.

"Good morning, fellows," from Dave. Joyce and Page answered; some of the others merely nodded coldly. Presently all had strolled away except Joyce and Page.

"You see how it is, Darry," murmured Joyce. "You've hurt the fellows."

"Are they going to cut me after this?" Dave asked. His smile was friendly, though the look in his eyes was cool.

"No-o-o," hesitated Midshipman Joyce. "I

don't believe the fellows will exactly cut you; at least, not unless the situation grows more acute. But many of the fellows are sore on you for your words last night."

"My words were only my words. My opinion doesn't have to govern anyone else, Joyce."

"But, hang it, Darry, the class doesn't want to cut you out! Can't you get that through your head?"

"The class doesn't have to cut me."

"But it will, if it puts Jetson in Coventry and you break the Coventry. That's what the fellows hate to do to you, and that's why they're all so sore at you."

"I see," nodded Dave.

"Come, now, Darry, you're going to be reasonable, aren't you?" begged Joyce. "Don't break your friends all up with your stubbornness."

"I note that two of the fellows are talking with Jetson," continued Dave, letting his glance wander to another group.

"They have a right to," contended Joyce. "The class hasn't yet committed itself as to Jetson."

"Darry, if you don't look out," warned Page, "you'll precipitate matters. You may bring the storm down on Jetson if you test the temper and stubbornness of an offended class."

"I see that I was wrong in at least one particular," nodded Dave thoughtfully. "I shouldn't have made any remark about my intentions. I should have confined myself to a plea for Jetson. Then, if the class had gone against my view I could have ignored the class action and have taken the consequences just the same."

"Oh, hang you!" cried Page impulsively.

"Darry," begged Midshipman Joyce, resting a hand on his friend's arm, "don't do any more talking about this. Just let things quiet down."

"I'm perfectly willing to stop talking about it," agreed Dave. "In fact, since the class adjourned its meeting I haven't said a word on the subject except in answer to some other fellow's remarks."

Page and Joyce strolled away, leaving Dave by himself to think matters over. As it happened, the two second classmen with whom Jetson had been talking had now left the sulky midshipman, who, at this moment, was coming down the walk in Dave's direction.

"Good morning, Jetson," nodded Dave pleasantly, though not too cordially.

Midshipman Jetson paused a moment, looked Darrin full in the eyes, and then passed on.

"Not promising material to work with, at first," Dave told himself, laughingly.

There was no time for further thought, for it was within two or three minutes for the first formation for morning recitations. Dave ran back to his room, picked up a book and a writing pad.

"How have the fellows been treating you, chum?" asked Dalzell, looking up anxiously.

"To a most liberal dose of advice," laughed Darrin.

Dan sighed.

"Do you wish I'd take some of the advice, old fellow?"

"I don't know that I do," Dan answered slowly and with unwonted gravity for him. "I'm not one of the padre's star young men, and I don't often discourse on morality. Yet I'm inclined to believe that, when a fellow goes contrary to the spirit of the crowd, and is satisfied that he is doing so from generous and manly motives, he is pretty likely to be pursuing the right course. After a fellow has made a real effort to listen to his conscience, I don't believe he is ever wrong in following it."

"Thank you, Danny boy. That's always been the way it has struck me. I don't want to do any injustice to Jetson—or to the class, either."

"If you have to go to Coventry," announced Dalzell, giving a final brushing to his hair and fitting on his cap, "I'm going with you."

"But you don't have to, Dan! A fellow's roommate doesn't have to observe a Coventry."

"If it comes to Coventry," muttered Dalzell, "I shall invite it by speaking to Jetson, too."

Dave Darrin was aghast. He hadn't contemplated dragging Dan into such a scrape.

"There's formation now," announced Dan.

Out in front of the entrance, and along the terrace the many sections were falling in. Dan had occasion to pass the now very unpopular Jetson.

"Good morning, Jetson," was Dan's greeting.

Jetson started slightly, then replied, with a sulky frown:

"Good morning, Dalzell."

"Glad he'll speak to me," thought Dan with an inward grimace, "for I'm afraid that, before long, I'll be in the way of feeling mighty lonely a good deal of the time."

In another moment or two the sections were marching away, with the steady, rhythmic, tread peculiar to bodies of military in motion.

"I wonder how it is all going to come out?" sighed Dan, as he seated himself at his desk in the section room in the Academic Building.

"I wonder what sort of crazy or calculating grandstand play Darrin is trying to make just now?" pondered Midshipman Jetson, when informed of Dave's action at the meeting.

CHAPTER XX

"DON'T BE A FOOL, DARRY!"

A WEEK went by without another classs meeting.

For that reason Midshipman Jetson was still nominally in good fellowship.

The delay in action was by no means due to lack of class interest. The class seethed with interest in the affair, but with many of the midshipmen there was a belief that here was a case where slow and thoughtful consideration would be best for all concerned.

Darry was too good a fellow, and far too popular to be forced out of fellowship if it didn't have to be done to preserve the present feeling of ruffled class dignity.

Knowing that the matter hadn't been dropped, the first and third classes waited—in curiosity. The fourth class really had no standing in such weighty matters of the internal discipline of the brigade.

Every time that Dave Darrin passed Jetson he spoke pleasantly to the latter. The sulky one, however, did not respond.

"Some day, Darry, you'll tumble that you've been played for a fool," grumbled Farley.

"Then I'll have the satisfaction, won't I, of knowing that it's all my own fault?" smiled Dave Darrin.

"Yes; but I hate to see you go to pieces for a fellow like Jetson."

The following Saturday afternoon Darrin came in from a brisk walk, to find Dan poring over his books at the study desk.

"Letter there for you," said Dan, without looking up, as Dave, after glancing into the room, had turned with the intention of calling on Farley and Page.

"Thank you." Darrin crossed the room, picking up the letter. "From Belle," he remarked. "The second from her this week, and I haven't written her. Answering letters should be part of a man's honor, so instead of cruising about on the deck, I reckon I'd better sit down and write Belle."

"What are you going to tell her?" asked Dan quietly, without looking up.

"Hang it all!" grumbled Dave. "This is where the situation begins to be tough. Of course, you understand how things are, Danny boy, and you are aware that I have asked Belle to take upon herself the right to be equally interested with me in my career."

"It is tough," assented Dan, with ready sympathy, and laying aside his book for the

moment. "If my memory serves, Belle asked particularly, when she was here, that you let her know how the Jetson row turned out."

"Yes; she did."

"And now you've got to tell her—what?"

"Have I got to tell her?" wondered Darrin aloud. "Yes; any other course would be unfair. But another question is, have I a right to tell her just what took place in a class meeting?"

"I think so," spoke up Dalzell. "Of course, you needn't attempt to report the speeches, or anything like that, but it's rather clear to me that you have a right to tell Belle the exact news so far as it affects you—and therefore her."

"Thank you." Dave drew out stationery, picked up a pen and began to write. Dalzell returned to his text-book. When Dave had written the letter, he read to Dan the portion that related to a description of the Jetson matter before the class.

"I think it's all right to send that much of a statement," nodded Dan.

"Then I'm going to mail the letter at once, and it will go out to-night. Belle tells me that she is extremely anxious to know the outcome of the matter. Poor girl, I'm afraid my letter may be even worse than no news."

"Belle didn't betroth herself to the uniform

or the Navy, if I know her," returned Dan quietly.

Dave went out and mailed the letter. It would not reach Belle until Monday morning. Wednesday afternoon, on returning from the last recitation, Dave found her answer on his study table.

"Want to hear a part of it, Dan?" questioned Midshipman Darrin.

"Of course I do," admitted that young man.

"Listen, then," and Dave read from Belle's letter as follows:

" 'I won't attempt to say that I am not in the least worried or bothered over the turn the Jetson matter has taken,' " ran Belle's letter. " 'I can't help feeling vitally interested in anything that concerns you. But you tell me that you have followed your own sense of honor and your own conscience in the matter. The best man that ever lived couldn't do better than that. I hope—oh, I *do* hope—that the whole affair will turn out in some way that will not be disagreeable to you. But remember, Dave, that the light-headed little High School girl who plighted her faith to you is interested in you—not particularly in a future Naval officer, necessarily. If the affair should go to the worst ending, and you find it advisable to resign from the Naval Academy on account of any class feeling, there

are plenty of bright prospects in life for an honorable and capable man. Don't ever imagine that I shall be disappointed over anything that you do, as long as you remain true to yourself and your manhood. And I will add, if you care to know it, that I approve of what you have done and am proud of you for your grit to do the right thing.' "

"A great girl!" cried Dan admiringly. "Just the kind of girl, too, that I was sure she is."

"Just the same," commented Dave musingly, "I know quite well that Belle has set her heart on seeing me serve in the Navy with credit."

"She wanted that because she knew you wanted it," Dan assured him.

Darrin was in the middle of his week's studies, where every minute's work counted, but he took the time to write an intense, if short, answer to Belle's letter. That finished, and dropped in the mail-box, he went back to his room and began to study.

Rap-tap! Farley slipped into the room.

"Thought I'd better come right away, Darry," explained the caller. "The news won't keep. A class meeting is called for Friday night right after supper. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Yes," Dave answered steadily.

"Old fellow, we all hope to see you come back

to yourself at the meeting," went on Farley earnestly, resting a hand on Dave's blue sleeve.

"Meaning that I should desert my convictions and bow to the class?"

"Yes; if you put it that way. Darry, old friend, don't feel that you know more than the entire brigade."

"I don't," Dave answered.

"Then you'll drop the line of talk you started the other night?"

"No."

"Darry, old friend!"

"I haven't changed my mind. Then, if I changed my attitude, wouldn't I be acting a false part?"

"Don't be a prig, Darry!"

"Be a knave instead, eh?"

"Darry, you ought to have been born a Puritan!"

"I'm glad I wasn't," Dave smiled.

"And are you enjoying yourself?"

"No," Dave anwered seriously. "I'm not. Neither is Jetson. It is likely that the class may do a great injustice to us both."

"Why are you so struck on a fellow like Jetson?" pursued the other midshipman.

"I'm not," Dave rejoined. "But I think, if he could be awakened, he has qualities that would make us all like him."

"And you're going to throw yourself away on such thankless missionary work, Darry?"

"Not at all. I'm acting on my best lights, as I see them for myself."

"I'm sorry," sighed Farley honestly.

"And so am I. Don't believe that I enjoy the situation that has been created."

"That you've created for yourself, you mean!"

"I see that you can't or you won't, understand it, Farley."

"I wish I could understand it!" quivered Farley, who felt far more unhappy than he was willing that Dave should see. In the end, Farley returned to his own room, pondering deeply and trying to think out some plan of speech or of action that would save Midshipman Dave Darrin from the class anger that seemed certain to come.

After supper and just before study time was due, Dave went to Jetson's door and knocked. As he entered he found Warner, the other midshipman quartered there, as well as Jetson.

"Good evening, gentlemen," began Dave, after he had stepped into the room and closed the door.

"Good evening, Darrin," responded Warner, while Jetson merely scowled and picked up a book.

"Warner," went on Dave, "I came here to have a brief talk with Mr. Jetson. Would it be asking too much to ask you to step outside—unless Mr. Jetson feels that he would prefer that you remain?"

"Mr. Jetson prefers that Mr. Warner remain, and that Mr. Darrin take himself away with great expedition," broke in Jetson decisively.

But Warner thought differently, and, with a murmured "certainly, Darrin," he left the room.

"I won't ask you to take a seat, Mr. Darrin," said Jetson, "because I'll be candid enough to say that I hope you won't remain long."

"I don't need a seat," laughed Dave easily, "for I've heard that the best Americans transact their business on their feet. Mr. Jetson, I've come on a somewhat embarrassing mission."

"Yes?"—sneeringly.

"You know quite well the snarl that is to be untied before the class meeting Friday evening."

"Quite well," replied Jetson sulkily. "It is a situation that I owe to the fact of having been acquainted with yourself, Mr. Darrin."

"Jetson," resumed Dave, dropping the formal "Mr.," "the situation is one that menaces you and your standing here. It menaces me equally. I could get myself out of the scrape quite easily by withdrawing from the stand that I took the other night."

"I either fail or refuse to understand why you went to the risk that you did the other night, Mr. Darrin."

"If I were to retract what I said," Darrin added, "it would cause me to violate whatever respect I may have for right and justice. On the other hand, Jetson, surely you do not consider yourself right in refusing an apology for a remark in which you thoughtlessly cast an unjust reflection upon the whole body of midshipmen."

"To what is this leading, Mr. Darrin?"

"Jetson, your own sense of honor and justice surely tells you that you owe it to yourself to go before the meeting Friday evening——"

"I shall not attend, Mr. Darrin. The class may take whatever action it chooses in my absence."

"Jetson, you owe it to yourself, as well as to the class, to offer your apology for a remark that reflected upon the whole brigade. You can violate no feeling of honor or proper pride by such an apology. In fact, I do not see how you can justify yourself in withholding such apology for having expressed a sentiment which you know you did not mean in the way that the brigade has taken it."

"My feelings on questions of honor cannot possibly concern you, Mr. Darrin."

"On the contrary, your conduct does vitally concern me, Jetson. If you do not make your apology the class will—well, you know what will happen,"

"Yes, I know," Jetson assented, his brow darkening.

"And possibly you know what it means to me. By my own statement—and I cannot, in honor retract it, I shall be compelled to share Coventry with you."

"No, you won't sir!" retorted Jetson, rising, his face ablaze with sulky anger. "You may go to Coventry, Mr. Darrin, and welcome, but you shall not share mine with me. You shall not share anything whatever with me—not even the air of this room if I can prevail upon you to take yourself out of a room where you are not wanted. Mr. Darrin, I indulge myself in the honor of wishing you—good evening!"

Jetson crossed the room, threw open the door and bowed low. Flushing, breathing quickly, Dave Darrin stepped out into the corridor and the door closed smartly behind him.

CHAPTER XXI

MIDSHIPMAN JETSON HAS THE FLOOR

IT was Friday afternoon, and the last sections had been dismissed in front of Bancroft Hall. The balance of the afternoon belonged to the midshipmen, though most of them found it necessary to give the time to study.

Jetson was not one of the latter. Always well up in his studies, he had no occasion to worry about daily markings or semi-annual examinations.

He had not grown less sulky, but he found himself a victim of unusual restlessness. So he decided upon remaining out in the open air for the present.

Though actuated by a very different class of feelings, Darrin, also, felt disinclined for books. He tried to study, for a few minutes, but gave it up and caught up his cap. The winter day being mild, he did not trouble himself to don his uniform overcoat.

"Going to slip your cable?" inquired Dan, who was moored fast to a text-book.

"Yes; I feel the need of fresh air."

"Shove off, then!"

Dave went out quietly, Dan gazing curiously after his friend until the door had closed behind him.

"Poor chap," muttered Dan. "I reckon he has need enough of something to stop that restless feeling. The class meets to-night!"

Jetson, after some fifteen minutes of aimless wandering, felt himself attracted to the gymnasium. Going inside, he went to his locker, where, with feverish energy, he changed to gym. costume.

For a few minutes the sulky one performed on the flying rings. He was an adept at this work, and something in the rapid motion soothed his troubled mind.

Tiring of the rings at last, Jetson stood with folded arms, looking about him, until his eyes lighted with interest on the trapezes. One was up higher than the rest. Drawn toward this one, Jetson took hold of the climbing rope and drew himself up, hand over hand. Seating himself on the bar, he sat looking about at the few other midshipmen who were exercising at that hour.

"There comes that Darrin fellow," thought Jetson, with a sudden burst of rage. "Wonder if he's going to work this afternoon? If he does, I'll put it all over him, even if I break my neck in the trying."

Back and forth swung Jetson, getting up speed on the trapeze. Then, suddenly, he threw his head downward, hanging on by his knees. An intentional slip, and he hung fully downward his ankles holding at the ends of the crossbar.

Folding his arms, Jetson again began to swing as he hung head downward. Among the midshipmen there were not so very many who were skillful at this form of exercise. Jetson was, and he was secretly proud of it.

"This will put the fellow Darrin to the bad if he came in with any notion of showing off," thought the sulky one exultantly.

Now the other midshipmen turned to leave the gym. In a moment more the only two left were Darrin and the man on the trapeze. In addition to the midshipmen there were two gym. attendants at some little distance.

"Who's doing that fine work?" wondered Dave, stepping closer. "Why, it's Jetson! Well, he has one accomplishment that I really envy him!"

Midshipman Jetson was now going through some rapid evolutions, first hanging head downward, and then, after developing speed, raising himself and turning over the crossbar. It was really work of which any athlete might have been proud.

"Say, Jim," muttered one attendant to the other, "that middie has me nervous for fair."

"Forget it," advised the other attendant. "It's the middie's neck, not yours."

"But we took the net down that goes with that bar. Suppose the young man should fall. He'd break his neck, and what could we say with the net gone?"

"He's no business up there at this late hour in the afternoon," grumbled the other man.

"That talk won't save us, either, if anything happens."

Jetson, filled with the desire to show off before the comrade he hated, had increased the speed of his brilliant flying movements.

But suddenly he slipped. There was no regaining his grip. With a howl of fright he felt himself plunging head downward more than thirty feet to the hard floor of the gym. He was in a fair way of landing on his head, cracking his skull and breaking his neck. Worse, in his sudden dread, he seemed to have lost control of his muscles.

"Turn! Land on your feet!" called Dave.

It all happened in a second. Dave, brief as the instant was, realized that the other midshipman was not going to land on his feet. In the same fleeting moment that Darrin called he hurled himself into position.

Straight down shot Jetson. Dave waited, with outstretched arms, ready to risk his own neck in the effort to save his sulky comrade.

From their end of the gym. the two startled attendants had watched the impending disaster, but there was no time for them to do anything.

From the way that Jetson fell it looked as though he had made a straight dive for Dave Darrin's head. At all events, their heads met in sharp collision.

Down went Dave, as though shot, and Jetson went with him, but Darrin's outstretched arms had grasped the other's body, and Jetson was saved the worst of his fall.

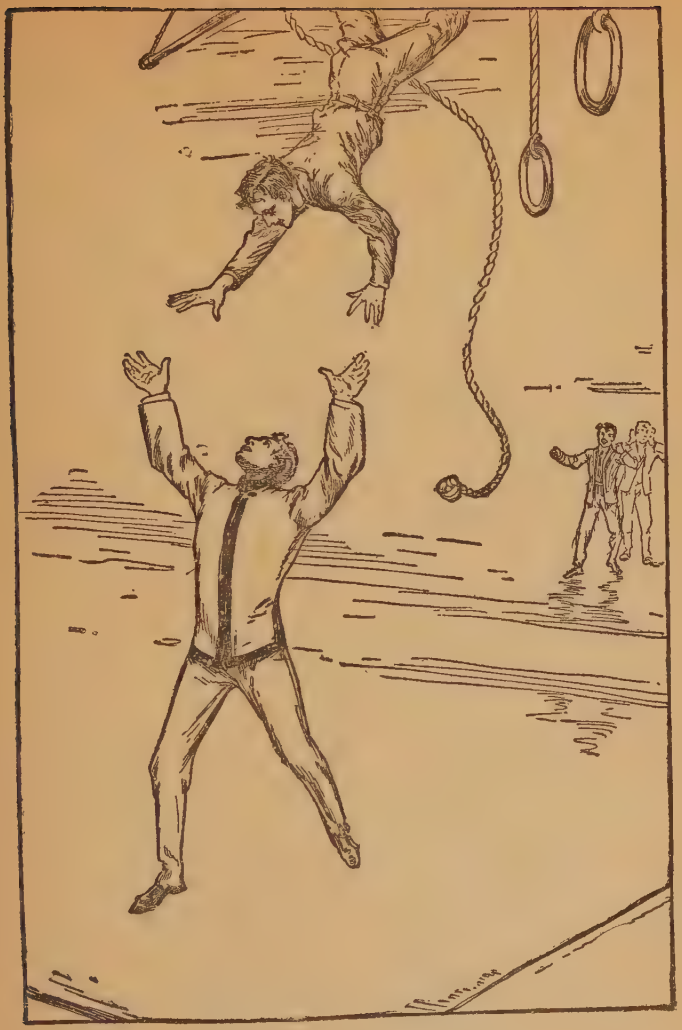
Now the two midshipmen lay where they had fallen, Jetson lying somewhat across Dave's motionless body.

"They're killed!" yelled the attendant Jim hoarsely.

"We'll look 'em over first, before we give up," retorted the other attendant, stooping and gently rolling Jetson over on his back.

"Sure they're killed, Bob," protested Jim huskily. "They met head on. You'll find that both middies have their skulls broken."

"Bring two pails of water, you chump," ordered Bob. "I tell you, we won't raise a row until we've done the best we can for 'em."



Straight Down Shot Jetson.

The water was brought. Under liberal dashes of it over his face and neck Jetson soon opened his eyes.

"I—I had a bad fall, didn't I?" he asked of the man nearest him.

"You'd have broken your neck, sir, if Mr. Darrin hadn't jumped forward and broken the force of your fall."

"I'd rather any other man had saved me," muttered the sullen one, slowly aiding himself to sit up. "How did Mr. Darrin do it?"

"Well, sir," responded Bob, "he stopped you partly with his head, and it would have been broken, only he had his hands out and gripped you at the shoulders or trunk. It may be that his head was split as it was, but I hardly think so."

Two more liberal douses of water, and Dave, too, opened his eyes.

"Is Jetson all right?" was Darrin's first question.

"Yes," muttered Midshipman Jetson, "and thanks to you, as I understand it."

"Oh, if you're all right, then I'm glad," responded Dave. "Bob, have you time to help me to stand up?"

"How do you feel, sir?" asked Bob, after he had complied and stood supporting Midshipman Darrin on his feet.

"Just a bit dizzy, Bob; but that'll pass off in a moment. Jetson, I'm glad to see you alive. Not badly jolted, I hope?"

Jim was now aiding Jetson to his feet.

"Do you want a surgeon, either of you?" asked Bob.

Both midshipmen shook their heads.

"I think I'll go over to one of the side seats," remarked Darrin, and Bob piloted him there, while Jim aided Jetson out to the shower room and locker.

Dave Darrin soon conquered the dizzy feeling enough to stand up and walk without assistance.

"I think I'll go, now," he told Bob. "I don't believe there is anything that I can do for Mr. Jetson."

"There is, sir, if you don't mind," interposed Jim, striding up. "Mr. Jetson has just asked if you mind waiting for him."

"My compliments to Mr. Jetson, and I shall be glad to wait for him."

The sulky midshipman soon hove in sight, having donned his uniform. He came up to Dave looking decidedly embarrassed.

"Mr. Darrin, I fear I must thank you for having stopped my course to the floor," admitted Jetson, with a sheepish grin.

"I won't make it too hard to thank me," re-

plied Dave, with a smile. "I'll just say that you're wholly welcome."

"But if you hadn't caught me in just the way that you did, your skull would have been smashed by the impact with my head. You risked your life for me, Mr. Darrin."

"I didn't stop to think of that, at the time. At any rate, risking one's life goes with the Naval service, doesn't it?"

"It was a splendid thing for you to do, Mr. Darrin! May I walk along with you?"

Dave nodded. It was dark, now, and that portion of the yard appeared clear of any moving beings but themselves.

"Darrin," continued Jetson, "when you risked Coventry in the effort to save me from it, I thought you were posing, though for the life of me I couldn't fathom your motive. But the risk that you took this afternoon wasn't in the line of posing. Do you mind telling me why you did it?"

"I'd have done as much for any man in the brigade," Dave answered frankly.

"Just the same it has touched me—touched me deeply."

"I'm glad of that, Jetson," Dave answered heartily. "And now I hope that we can bury the hatchet and be friends, as men in the brigade should always be."

"But why do you want to be friends with a fellow like me?"

"Because I want to know the real Jetson—not the one that you present outside of a sulky exterior. Jetson, I know there's gold in you, and I want to see it brought to the surface. I want your friendship because—well, it may be a selfish reason, but I think it's worth having."

"That's a funny notion to take," laughed Midshipman Jetson uneasily. "I have never been conceited enough to fancy that my friendship was worth having."

"Let yourself out and be natural, man!"

"How?"

Then indeed did Dave Darrin plunge into his subject. There was a lot to be said, but Dave said it briefly, tersely, candidly. Jetson listened with a flushing face, it is true, but at last he stopped and held out his hand.

"Will you take it, Darrin?"

"With all my heart!"

There was chance for but little more talk, as now the slowly moving midshipmen were close to the entrance to Bancroft Hall.

"You'll be at the class meeting this evening, won't you?" asked Dave Darrin.

"You may be very sure that I shall!"

Then they entered the lobby of Bancroft Hall, parting and going their different ways.

In Darrin's eyes there was a strange flash as he turned down the "deck" on which he lived. But Dan, still absorbed in study, did not pay especial heed to his roommate.

Immediately after supper in the mess-hall, Dalzell caught his chum's arm.

"Let's get in early at the meeting, David, little giant. I'm afraid there's big trouble brewing, and we must both be on hand early. We may have some chance to talk a bit before the meeting is called to order."

"I don't believe I shall care to talk any, Danny boy, before the president raps."

"Don't be too stubborn, Davy! Your future will very likely be at stake to-night. Your most dependable friends will be on hand and under arms for you. Back 'em up!"

At least half of the class was gathered when the chums entered. Darrin looked about him, then took a seat. He watched the door until he saw Midshipman Jetson enter.

Rap, rap, rap! went the gavel at last.

"Gentlemen," announced the president, "there is some unfinished business before the meeting. At the last class meeting a motion was made and seconded that Midshipman Jetson be sent to Coventry. Any remarks that may be offered on that resolution will be in order now."

Dave Darrin was on his feet in an instant. Three or four men hissed, but Dave appeared not to notice.

"Mr. President," Dave began in a slow, steady voice, "this motion more closely affects Mr. Jetson than it does any other member of the class. I understand that Mr. Jetson has a few remarks to make."

There was a murmur that ran around the room as Jetson rose to his feet, claiming the chair's recognition.

"Mr. President and gentlemen," began Jetson, his face pale and his words coming with effort, "I am not going to discuss the question of whether the class will or will not be justified in sending me to Coventry. I have a duty to perform to-night, and I assure you that it comes hard, for my temper and pride have been beyond my control for a long time. I wish to make a most earnest apology for remarks of mine that were construed as being insulting to the members of the brigade. I further desire to make any statement, or any admission that will most quickly banish any sense of wrong coming from me. In doing so, I am moved to this proper course by my friend, Mr. Darrin!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE BIRTH OF A GENTLEMAN

IT wasn't a real bombshell that hit the class, of course, but the effect was almost as startling. First, there were murmurs, then a hubbub of voices, last of all a rousing cheer.

In the midst of the excitement Midshipman Farley leaped to his feet.

"Mr. President!" he bellowed.

But his voice did not carry ten feet from where he stood.

"Mr. President!" he yelled, louder than ever before.

Still the hubbub continued. Farley leaped to the seat of his chair, turning and waving both arms frantically. Any midshipman who had glanced toward the chair would have discovered that the occupant of the class chair was rapping hard with his gavel, though no sound of it was heard above the tumult.

Presently, however, Farley's antics produced their effect. The noise gradually lessened.

"Mr. President!" essayed Farley once more.

"Mr. Farley has the floor!" shouted the class president hoarsely.

"Mr. President," went on Farley, at the top of his voice, "class honor and that of the bri-

gade have been satisfied by the direct, manly statement of Mr. Jetson. I move you, sir, that the motion now before this body be tabled, all further action dropped and the class meeting adjourned subject to call."

"Second the motion!" yelled Page.

"The motion to adjourn must follow the disposal of the first part of the motion," ruled the chair.

"I accept the amendment," called Farley.

"I, also," assented Page.

"Question! question!"

"Before putting the motion," continued the chair, "I desire to ask Mr. Jetson if he has fully considered his statement and the revised position that he has taken? Since the matter affects the entire brigade, and not this single class, I feel that there should be no doubt, or any question to be raised later."

"Mr. President," announced Jetson, when he had secured recognition, "I have retracted any offensive words that I may have uttered. I have attempted no justification of any of my words, but have made flat apology."

"Three cheers for Jet!" shouted one impulsive midshipman.

"Any remarks?" questioned the chair.

"Mr. President!"

"Mr. Darrin."

"I do not see how Mr. Jetson's retraction or apology could be made any more explicit. I trust to see Mr. Farley's motion, seconded by Mr. Page, put to the vote and carried at once. I am wholly aware that I have incurred the class's displeasure (cries of 'no! no!') but I urge that whatever action may be taken regarding myself be deferred until after Mr. Jetson has been restored to the fullest measure of class and brigade fellowship."

"Any further remarks?" questioned the class president, when Darrin had seated himself. "If not, I will state the motion."

A few "nays" succeeded the great chorus of "ayes," and the motion of Coventry for Jetson was declared tabled.

"Any further action?" demanded the chair.

"Move we adjourn!" called Farley.

"Second the motion!" seconded Page.

The motion was put and carried without dissent. Then, amid the greatest jollity, the meeting was declared adjourned.

There was a rush of at least twenty men to shake hands with Jetson, who, with flushed but pleased face, bore his honors as modestly as he could.

"What on earth came over you, Jet?" demanded Joyce bluntly.

"It would be a long story about Darrin," re-

plied Midshipman Jetson. "He had the grace to show me that I was a constitutional ass, with perhaps some slight chance of being reborn. To make it short, Darrin persuaded me to come before the class, eat humble pie and set myself right with myself, even if I couldn't with the class."

"It was beautifully done, Jet," murmured Page, who was tremendously grateful at seeing Dave Darrin rescued from sacrificing himself to a principle.

"If any of you fellows catch me in the sulks hereafter," spoke up Jetson, though he winced as he said it, "I hope the man who catches me will do me the very great favor of passing me a few sound kicks before others have a chance to catch me to the bad."

"Bully for you—you're all right, Jet!" called several warmly.

Fully half of the class members had left the room by this time. Dan Dalzell, who had been thunderstruck, and who was now full of questions, was being urged out of the room by Dave.

"So Darry converted you, did he?" laughed Joyce. "Bully for Darry. Why, that great and good fellow dared the class to send him to Coventry after it got through with you. He accused the class of kicking a man without giving that man a chance to get up on his feet."

"It's a good deal like Darrin," remarked Jetson, his eyes a trifle misty, "though it took me a thundering long time to realize that Darrin was really of that kind."

"How did it happen, anyway?" insisted Farley.

"You've heard nothing about it?"

"Not a word—not a hint," protested Page eagerly.

There were less than twenty of the midshipmen now remaining in the room, so Jetson did not feel as embarrassed as he might have done had he been called upon to give the recital before a class meeting. He told his listeners the story of Dave's splendid conduct in the gym. that afternoon, and of the talk that had followed the reconciliation of the enemies.

"That was like good old Darry again," remarked Farley proudly. "No fellow has a warmer temper than Darry when he's aroused to righteous anger, but no fellow has a more generous temper at all times."

"Let's go down and jump in on Darry, all hands!" proposed Joyce.

"Listen!" warned Farley.

Study call! That took the young men hastily to their regular academic duties.

"One thing this business has done," remarked Midshipman Farley, looking up from his books.

"I'll be the goat," murmured Page.

"Darry has always been somewhat the leader of the class, ever since the fellows began to find him out, back in the first year here. But this last business has boosted Dave Darrin unmistakably and solidly now into the post of leader of the class."

"We're safe, then!" retorted Page. "Darry won't lead us into any trouble!"

The realization that Midshipman Dave Darrin was assured leader of the second class was not long in coming to most of the other men of the class.

Yet Dave did not seek the post, nor did he attempt to do any actual leading. He still considered himself as possessing one voice, and one only, in the class councils.

If Dave was leader, Dan Dalzell, both by reflected glory and by virtue of his own sterling merits as well, shared the leadership with Dave to a great extent. Dan's power might have gone further than it did had it not been for the fact that he was so full of mischief as to leave his comrades often in doubt as to whether he were really serious in what he said and did.

CHAPTER XXIII

"RAGGED," AND NO MISTAKE

"PLEBES Flint and Austin are having a good many callers," remarked Dave Darrin, halting by the door of quarters before he and Dan entered.

"Sure! Aren't you wise?" inquired Dan, with a wink.

"I think so," murmured Dave. "The callers all seem to be third classmen."

"Of course; they're putting the rookies through their paces."

"Surest thing!" murmured Dalzell without excitement.

"But this is March. Isn't it a rather late time in the year to be still hounding the poor new men?"

"I don't know," mused Dalzell. "It may be that Mr. Flint and Mr. Austin are unusually touge."

"Touge" is Annapolis slang for "fresh." It corresponds closely to the "b j" of West Point.

A sound as of protest came from behind a closed door at the further end of the deck.

"I hope our youngsters aren't going too far," Dave remarked, "youngster" being the accepted

term for the third classmen, and the same as "yearling" at West Point.

"Well, it's none of our business," replied Dan, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Study call will be along in fifteen minutes. Going to get an early start with the books to-night?"

"I guess that will be wise," Darrin nodded. "It surely will."

The rest of the winter had gone along rather uneventfully, save for the inevitable, overpowering amount of grind through which a midshipman must pass. It was now spring, and midshipmen thoughts were divided between two topics—annual exams. and summer cruise.

Dan had started into the room, and Dave was about to follow, when he heard an unusually loud thud at the further end of the deck.

"Danny boy, the plebes must be getting it hard to-night."

"I'd like to see the fun," muttered Dalzell, his eyes snapping with mischief. "But it doesn't seem to be any of our business. Hazing work is left in charge of the youngster crowd."

"Yes; a second classman shouldn't interfere," assented Dave. "Well, study for ours."

"I'm afraid I'm not as studious as I was a minute ago," contended Dan, with a grin.

Dave looked almost startled as he seized his chum by the arm.

"Inside with you, Danny boy!"

"Not under compulsion," laughed Midshipman Dalzell.

"I'll condescend to coaxing, then. But don't anger the youngsters by butting in."

"And why not? An upper classman has a right to step in, if he wishes."

"It is, at least, against the rules of good taste to interfere," argued Darrin.

"Well, hang you, I don't want to interfere. All I want to do is to look on. Can't an upper classman do that?"

"I won't," returned Dave.

Yet almost immediately he changed his mind, for two hard bumps and a gust of laughter swept up the deck.

"They're making so much racket," murmured Dave, lingering by his own door, "that, the first thing we know, a duty officer will swoop down and rag the bunch."

"Let's go in, then, as grave and dignified second classmen, and warn the youngsters like daddies," proposed Dan, but his eyes were twinkling with the spirit of mischief.

A good deal against his own inclination Darrin allowed himself to be coaxed into the thing.

Nine youngsters were found in Midshipmen Flint and Austin's room when Dave and Dan entered after rapping.

"We're not intruding, I hope?" inquired Dalzell, with his most inviting grin.

"Not at all, gentlemen," responded Midshipman Eaton, of the third class.

"These fourth classmen seemed unwontedly popular to-night," insinuated Dan.

"They've been most uncommonly touge all through the year, sir," replied Eaton, tacking on the "sir" in order to impress Midshipmen Flint and Austin with the tremendous dignity of all upper classmen.

"What form does their tougeness take?" Dan wanted to know.

"They have not yet learned the respect that is due to upper classmen, sir."

"And especially to third classmen?" inquired Dan, now without the flicker of a smile.

"They are especially touge, sir, with third classmen."

"And you are showing them the error of their ways?"

"We are trying to do so, sir."

"I thought so, from the noise we heard," pursued Dalzell.

"If you have any better ways, Mr. Dalzell, we shall be glad to profit from your riper experience, sir," suggested Midshipman Eaton.

"No; I've forgotten almost everything that I ever knew in that line," remarked Dan.

"Mr. Darrin, sir?" suggested Eaton, turning to the other second classman present.

"I have nothing to suggest," replied Dave slowly, "unless——" Then he paused.

"Unless—sir?" followed up Midshipman Eaton.

"No; I won't say it. It might give offense," Darrin responded.

"Have no fear of that, Mr. Darrin," urged Eaton.

"All I was going to suggest, Eaton, was that this is the month of March."

"Yes, sir?" inquired Eaton wonderingly.

"When Dalzell and I were fourth classmen we weren't troubled at all by the youngsters after Christmas. Last year, Eaton, our class didn't bother yours at any later date, either."

Some of the youngsters present began to look embarrassed, though Dave's tone had been quiet and free from rebuke.

"But, sir, don't imagine that we're doing anything to the plebes for our own amusement," protested Eaton. "This is the only pair of the fourth class left that need any attention from our class. These two young misters are the tougest lot we've had to deal with. In fact, sir, they're ratey!"

"Still," rejoined Dan Dalzell, "I think you

are keeping it up pretty late in the year, even if they are ratey."

A midshipman who is "ratey," as has been explained in an earlier volume, is a much greater offender than a midshipman who is merely touge. For a ratey fourth classman makes the foolish blunder of considering himself as good as an upper classman.

"Of course," suggested Dan, making haste to smooth over any astonishment that his own and his chum's remarks might have caused, "we don't propose to instruct the members of the third class in the way they shall perform their duties toward the members of the fourth. Don't let us interfere with you, Mr. Eaton."

"By no means," murmured Dave Darrin, smiling. "We don't wish to intrude."

"But wait just one moment gentlemen," begged Eaton. "We want you to see for yourselves how effectively we are smoothing the touge creases out of these baby midshipmen."

During the discussion Flint and Austin had been standing at one side of the room, looking decidedly sheepish. Both had their blouses off, though neither had been required to take off his collar. The trousers of the two fourth classmen were rather liberally overlaid with dust, showing that they must have been performing some rough stunts on the floor.

"Step over to that basin, mister," ordered Youngster Eaton, eyeing Flint, who promptly obeyed.

"Now, mister, stand on your head in that bowl," commanded Midshipman Eaton.

Looking doubly red and uncomfortable, with these two grave-looking second classmen present, Flint bent down, attempting to stand on his head in the bowl of water, while he tried, at the same time to push his feet up the wall, thus standing on his head. Twice Flint essayed the feat and failed, splashing a good deal of water over the floor. Then, for the third time, Flint tried the performance. This time he succeeded, but his two previous failures had provoked such a storm of laughter that no man present heard a cautious rap on the door. The next instant that door was flung open and Lieutenant Preston stepped into the room.

With the entrance of that discipline officer half of the midshipmen present wheeled about, then, startled as they were, did not forget to come to attention.

"Hm!" said Lieutenant Preston, at which the other half heard and came to attention. Flint, whether too scared, or perhaps enjoying the discomfiture of his tormentors, made no effort to return to normal position.

"What's your name, sir?" thundered the dis-

cipline officer, glaring fiercely at Midshipman Flint.

"Flint, sir," replied the fourth classman in a gasp.

"Bring your feet down and come to attention, sir!"

Flint obeyed.

During this time Lieutenant Preston had stood so that no midshipman in the room could slip by him into the corridor.

"I will now take the names of the gentlemen present," went on the discipline officer, drawing a notebook and pencil from an inner pocket and commencing to write.

"All except the fourth classmen present will at once fall in by twos outside," commanded Lieutenant Preston, closing the notebook and slipping it away. "Midshipmen Flint and Austin will mend their appearances as speedily as possible and then form the last file outside."

"Wow!" whispered Dan in his chum's ear outside. "Talk about the fifty-seven varieties! We're in all the pickles!"

"Yes," murmured Dave.

"What are you going to do about it, Davy?"

"Take my medicine," Dave replied.

"But we weren't really in the thing."

"Danny boy, never get out of a thing, or try to, by playing cry baby!"

"No danger," retorted Dalzell. "David, little giant, we'll just console ourselves with the realization that we're in the worst scrape we ever struck yet."

"Yes," nodded Dave.

Fourth classmen Flint and Austin were not long in making themselves presentable. Then they fell in at the rear of the line.

"Squad, forward march!" commanded the discipline officer dryly.

Through the corridor and off that deck the little squad of thirteen midshipmen marched. Never had thirteen been more unlucky, for the present superintendent was known to be a man determined to stamp out hazing.

Nor did the affair remain a secret for more than a moment. Midshipmen returning to their own decks stepped to the wall to let the squad pass. Nor was more than a look at the two rear fourth classmen needed to enable any wondering midshipmen to guess the nature of the offense with which the remaining eleven upper classmen were to be charged.

"Our Darry in that!" gasped Farley, as the squad went by. "Did you see him?"

"Yes," Page mournfully admitted.

"Then my eyes didn't play me any trick, as I had hoped. Darry and Dalzell! What evil spirit tempted them to be in that scrape?"

In the meantime Lieutenant Preston was arraigning the captured delinquents before the officer in charge, and the commandant of midshipmen had already been telephoned for and was on the way.

Study call cut short a good deal of excited discussion on the different decks. The commandant of midshipmen arrived, heard the evidence of the discipline officer, looked over the offenders, entered their names on his own record, and then spoke briefly, but in the voice of fate itself:

"The accused midshipmen will go to their rooms. They will, until further orders, remain in their quarters, except for recitations and meal formation. They will forego all privileges until the superintendent or higher authority has acted finally in this matter. That is all, young gentlemen. Go to your rooms, except Midshipmen Flint and Austin, who will remain."

As soon as the upper classmen had departed, the commandant took Flint and Austin in hand, questioning them keenly and making notes of the more important answers.

Back in their own rooms, Midshipman Dan Dalzell was at first overwhelmed with horror.

"We're dished, Davy! We walk the plank! The super won't forgive a single man who is caught at the royal pastime of hazing! I'm

going to write, now, for the money to get home with. You know, in the last two affairs, the hazers have been dismissed from the Naval Academy."

"Yes," Dave nodded. "It looks black for us. But keep a stiff upper lip, Danny boy."

"It's all my own miserable fault!" uttered Dalzell, clenching his fists, while tears tried to get into his eyes. "You've got me to blame for this, Davy! It was all my doing. I insisted on dragging you down to that room, and now you've got to walk the plank, all because of my foolishness! Oh, I'm a hoodoo!"

"Stop that, Danny!" warned Dave, resting a hand on his chum's arm. "I didn't have to go, and you couldn't have made me do it. I wouldn't have gone if I hadn't wanted to. I'm not going to let even you rest the blame for my conduct on your shoulders."

Finally the chums went to study table.

"What's the use?" demanded Dan, closing a book after he had opened it. "We don't need to study. We've got to walk the plank, at any rate, and all the study we do here for the next day or two is so much time wasted!"

"We may walk the plank," retorted Dave. "In fact, I feel rather certain that we shall. But it hasn't happened yet. Danny boy, open that book again, and open it at the right page.

Study until recall, and work harder than you ever did before. You know all about that old-time Navy man who said, 'Don't give up the ship!' "

They studied, or manfully pretended to, until release sounded. How much they learned from their books that night may have been a different matter.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

BY the next day it was generally conceded among the midshipmen that the ranks of the brigade were about to be thinned as a result of the last hazing episode. Nor did the third class generally uphold Eaton and his youngster associates in the affair of the night before.

"They were out for trouble, and they got it," declared one third classman. "The rest of us let up on all hazing before Christmas."

In some underground way Farley and Page heard the straight story concerning Dave and Dan; how the two upper classmen had gone to the room and Darrin had entered a mild protest against the hazing.

Though it was against regulations to visit men confined to their quarters, Farley took the chance and got a few words with Dave.

"Darry, don't let anyone trim you for what you didn't do," begged Midshipman Farley. "Go straight to the com.; tell him that you and Dan had just entered the room to see what was going on, and that you had just made a protest against the hazing."

"Nothing doing there, Farl," Dave gently assured his friend. "We were present and we really had no business to be. We wouldn't make ourselves look any more manly by crying when the medicine is held out to us."

"But you did protest," urged Farley anxiously. "Stand up for your own rights, Darry. Remember, I'm not counseling you to lie, or to make any stretched claims. That would be unworthy of you. But tell the full truth in your own defense."

"Dan and I will truthfully answer all questions put to us by competent officers," Dave replied gravely. "Farl, that is about all we can do and keep our self-respect. For, you understand, we were there, and we knew just about what we were going to look in on before we crossed the threshold of that room."

"But we can't lose you from the brigade, Darry," pleaded Farley hoarsely. "Nor can the people of this country spare you from the Navy of the future. Stick up for all your rights. That's all your friends ask of you. Remember, man, you're nearly three fourths of the way through to graduation! Don't let your fine chances be sacrificed."

Dave, however, still maintained that he was not going to play baby. In dismay some forty members of the second class held an unofficial

outdoor meeting at which ways and means were suggested. In the end Joyce, Farley and Page were appointed a committee of three to think the matter over solemnly, and then to go to the commandant of midshipmen with whatever statement they felt justified in making.

At the earliest possible moment the three waited outside the door of the commandant's office, after having sent in their cards and a message as to why they desired to see the commandant.

"Well, gentlemen," began the commandant briskly, "I understand that you want to see me in reference to the last hazing outrage. What have you to say?"

"We come in behalf of two members of our own class, sir," spoke up Farley.

"Hm! What do you expect to be able to say for Midshipmen Darrin and Dalzell? They do not attempt to deny the fact that they were present at the hazing, and that they were at least looking on when Lieutenant Preston entered the room."

"May I inquire, sir," replied Farley very respectfully, "whether either Mr. Darrin or Mr. Dalzell have stated that Mr. Darrin had just entered a protest against the hazing, and that they had made the protest just before Lieutenant Preston went into the room?"

"No; such a statement has not been made by either Mr. Darrin or Mr. Dalzell," admitted the commandant. "Are you sure that Mr. Darrin did protest?"

"I can only say, sir," replied Farley, "that I have been so informed. I also know, from Mr. Darrin's own lips, that he has refused to inform you that he made such a protest."

"Why?" shot out the commandant, eyeing Mr. Farley keenly.

"Because, sir, Mr. Darrin feels that he would be doing the baby act to enter such a defense."

"And so has commissioned you to appear for him?"

"No, sir," returned Farley almost hotly. "In fact, sir, I believe Mr. Darrin would be very angry if he knew what I am doing and saying at this moment. This committee, sir, was appointed by some forty members of the second class, sir, who are familiar with the facts. We have been sent to you, sir, by our classmates, who are frantic at the thought of losing the finest fellow in the class."

"I thank you, gentlemen," said the commandant, in a tone which signified the polite dismissal of the committee. "I will keep in mind what you have told me."

The investigation was being carried on daily. All of the third class offenders were put on the

carpet more than once. At the next session with the youngsters the commandant questioned them as to the truth of the statement that Darrin had tried to protest against the hazing.

"Why, yes, sir," Eaton admitted, "Mr. Darrin did say something against what we were doing."

"As an upper classman, did Mr. Darrin order you to stop?"

"No, sir," Eaton admitted; "he didn't command us to stop."

"What did Mr. Darrin say?"

"I can't state with accuracy, now, sir, just what Mr. Darrin did say to us."

"Did he disapprove of your acts?"

"Yes, sir. I am very certain that he made every third classman present feel uncomfortable."

"Then whatever Mr. Darrin's words were, they had the effect, if not the exact form, of a rebuke against your conduct?" pressed the commandant.

"Yes, sir," replied Midshipman Eaton with great positiveness.

Eaton's companions in the hazing all bore him out in the statement. The commandant of midshipmen then took up the matter of their testimony with the superintendent of the Naval Academy.

After six days of confinement to quarters, Darrin and Dalzell were ordered to report before the commandant. With that officer they found the superintendent also. It was the latter officer who spoke.

"Mr. Darrin and Mr. Dalzell, on the testimony of others, not of yourselves, we have learned that Mr. Darrin had just entered a rebuke against the hazing before Lieutenant Preston entered the room in which the hazing was taking place. We have this on such general assurance that both the commandant and myself feel warranted in restoring you to full duty and privileges. At the same time, Mr. Darrin, I desire to thank you for your manliness and attention to duty in entering a protest against the hazing."

"I thank you very much, sir," Dave Darrin answered. "However, much as I long to remain in the Navy, I do not want to hide behind a misunderstanding. While I spoke against the hazing, candor compels me to admit that I did not protest so vigorously but that more hazing went on immediately."

"That I can quite understand," nodded the superintendent. "I am aware of the disinclination of the members of one upper class to interfere with the members of another upper class. The fact that you made a protest at all is what

has convinced me that yourself and Mr. Dalzell were in the room at the time with a worthy instead of an unworthy motive. Worthy motives are not punished at the Naval Academy, Mr. Darrin. For that reason yourself and Mr. Dalzell are restored to full duty and privileges. That is all, gentlemen."

Thus dismissed, Dave and Dan could not, without impertinence, remain longer in the room.

There was wild joy in the second class when it was found that the class leaders, Darrin and Dalzell, had escaped from the worst scrape they had been in at Annapolis.

Eaton, Hough and Paulson, of the third class, proved to have been the ringleaders in the hazing. They were summarily dismissed from the Naval Academy, while the other six youngsters implicated in the affair all came in for severe punishments that fell short of dismissal.

After that matters went on smoothly enough for the balance of the term. Dave, Dan, Joyce, Farley, Page, Jetson and all their closest intimates in the class succeeded in passing their annual examinations. Jetson, in addition, had made good in his new rôle of amiable fellow.

As these young men, now new first classmen, stood on the deck of a battleship, watching the Naval Academy fade astern, at the beginning

of the summer cruise, Dave Darrin turned to his friends, remarking wistfully:

"Fellows, if we get through one more year of it without falling down, we shall then be putting to sea once more, and then as graduated midshipmen, afloat in our effort to win our ensign's commissions!"

How did they come out?

The answer must be deferred to the next and last volume of this series, which is published under the title, "Dave Darrin's Fourth Year at Annapolis; Or, Headed for Graduation and the Big Cruise."

The End

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